

8 Extreme weather in the US and elsewhere

8.1 Introduction

Weather extremes, usually related to temperature and/or precipitation, often ~~can~~ disrupt infrastructure and therefore ~~endanger~~ human health and ~~thrivability~~ wellbeing. Indeed, the ability of any surface-dwelling species to live productively is somewhat constrained by these extremes which in essence create the bounding limits for survival. The issue is ~~not whether extremes occur~~, for they are intrinsic to the chaotic climate system. Rather, it is whether there are long-term (decadal scale) changes in the frequency and/or character of extremes ("detection"), as well as the extent to which such changes ~~here is whether these extremes~~, and their attendant changes in potential danger hazards, may ~~are~~ be changing and if so whether the change is in response ~~caused by~~ to anthropogenic emissions increases in infrared-absorbing greenhouse gases (GHGs) ("attribution"; (e.g., IPCC AR6 Seneviratne et al. 2021).

~~It is naive to assume that any recent unprecedented extreme event observed recently is caused by human influences on the climate. Unfortunately, that's~~ That assumption is wrong in two ways. First, climate is about the statistical properties of weather over decades, not single events. And second, ~~there are only about 130 years of the reliable~~ Unfortunately, observational records that can be analyzed statistically extend back only for the sample of time from which we are able to quantitatively analyze variations in extreme events is quite brief, about around 130 years. That brief interval ~~does not~~. This period certainly does not begin to contain all of the extreme events that the climate system is able to ~~can~~ create naturally on its own. Over geologic time the climate system has generated an (essentially) infinite variety of weather patterns and extremes which ~~that~~ humans have never observed, and thus ~~do not enter our~~ are absent from the databases from which ~~used to~~ determine extreme statistics.¹ ~~are determine d~~ [see *Perils of short data records* below]. Thus, ~~assuming that a~~ For that reason, attributing climate pattern or an extreme event hitherto unprecedented in the record ~~not experienced in our lifetime must therefore be the result of enhanced GHG concentrations~~ requires the assumptions about the smallness/magnitude of that natural variations are insignificant.

This is especially true for precipitation events. The hydrological literature has long noted the phenomenon of *Long Term Persistence* (LTP) in rainfall data (Hurst 1951, Cohn and Lins 2005, Markonis and Koutsoyiannis 2015). LTP has a formal mathematical definition but it can be thought of intuitively as the presence of natural variations with strong autocorrelation properties that result in cycle-like behavior on long time scales. The presence of LTP requires very-long data ~~samples/records to obtain accurately accurate estimates of variance~~ variability. Analysis of, ~~analysis of data samples that are records short relative to the LTP scale will tend to yield underestimates~~ variability, therefore ~~underestimated variances which in turn yields overstating~~ the significance of apparent trends and ~~underestimation~~ underestimating of the likelihood of extreme events (Cohn and Lins 2005).

A good example of LTP is the eight-century long record of the annual minimum height of the Nile River observed at Roda Island in Cairo ~~shown below~~ in Figure 8.1.1. Since human influences on the global climate were negligible before the 20th century, the century-scale variability of the thirty-year average is entirely natural; Egyptians of the seventh and eight centuries would have been incorrect to assume that the worsening drought during that time was the "new normal."

Commented [A1]: Need to get a good citation for these data

Formatted: Superscript

¹ For example, under the simplest statistical assumptions there is a 37 percent chance that a 100-year event is NOT present in a century-long record.

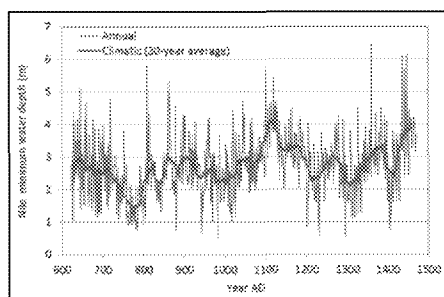


Figure 8.1.1: Nile River discharge [details, source]

With these caveats in mind we examine the evidence for changes in selected weather and climate extremes. A theme that emerges when reviewing this topic is the wide gap between public perceptions and scientific evidence. It has become routine in media discussions, government and private sector discussions and even in some academic literature to make generalized assertions that extreme weather of all types is getting worse due to GHGs and climate change. Yet expert assessments have not typically drawn such sweeping conclusions and instead have emphasized the difficulty both of identifying specific trends and establishing a causal connection with anthropogenic forcing.

In the sections to follow we cite provide excerpts from various IPCC and NCA assessment reports denoting the sources as follows:

For the benefit of readers who may not have read the relevant reports in the Appendix to this chapter we will begin provide with extended excerpts of these findings from previous IPCC and NCA assessments, then in the remainder of this chapter survey additional data relevant to US and global extreme weather trends.

8.2 Review of IPCC and NCA Findings on Extreme Weather

The sources we review will be denoted as follows:

SREX: The IPCC *Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation* (2012)

AR5: The IPCC *Fifth Assessment Report Working Group 1* (2013).

AR6: The IPCC *Sixth Assessment Report Working Group 1* (2021).

NCA17: The US *Climate Science Special Report of the Fourth National Climate Assessment* (2017) Volume I Chapter 6.

Note that in the excerpts provided *italics* are in the original whereas **boldface** emphasis is added.

8.2.1 Overview Context: IPCC Assessment of signal emergence in extreme weather types (AR6 WG1 Table 12.12)

This chapter is concerned with detection of trends. Chapter 7 looked at attribution including for extreme weather. Since there is considerable public interest in the question of whether humans are causing trends in extreme weather to get worse it is useful to begin with the summary Table 8.2.1 which reproduces the findings of AR6 Table 12.12 which indicates, for 34 major weather event and impact types, whether a signal of anthropogenic forcing has been detected in the historical record (column 1), whether such a signal is likely to emerge by 2050 under the extreme RCP8.5 scenario (column 2) and whether it is likely to emerge by 2100 under RCP8.5 forcing (column 3). It should be borne in mind that the latter two columns suffer from the deficiencies of GCMs discussed in Chapter XX. And as we discussed in Ch X7 on attribution, AR6 offers conflicting messages about attribution of extreme weather. Nevertheless, we provide this Table for reference context.

Several patterns stand out. First, detection of an anthropogenic signal is asserted with *high confidence* in only four of the 34 weather impact categories, and with *medium confidence* in a further four. The IPCC does NOT claim to have detected an anthropogenic signal in the remaining 26 categories. Of the four *high confidence* assertions, two are for changes in average temperatures (air and ocean), which are not measures of extreme weather. Further, two of the four *medium confidence* assertions are related to ocean chemistry and are also not related to extreme weather. The IPCC does NOT assert a detectable human influence on many non-temperature weather features such as wind, precipitation, flooding, and drought.

Second, columns 2 and 3 show that the IPCC expects very few anthropogenic trends to emerge within this century, even under the most extreme forcing scenario. As we discuss in Section 4.2 the RCP8.5 scenario is an implausible high-end storyline, not a “base case” or “business-as-usual” projection. Even so, most weather impacts are not expected to show an anthropogenic signal this century. Natural variability dominates patterns of extreme weather systems and simplistic assertions of trend detection are frequently undermined by regional heterogeneity and trend reversals over time.

Climate Impact Driver Type	Climate Impact Driver Category	Already Emerged in the Historical Record?	Emerging by 2050 in Most Extreme CO2 Emissions Scenario?	Emerging by 2100 in Most Extreme CO2 Emissions Scenario?
Heat & Cold	Average air temperature	YES in most regions	YES	YES
	More heat extremes	YES in most regions	YES in land regions	YES
	Fewer cold extremes	YES in a few regions	YES in many regions	YES
	Less frost	NO	NO	NO
Wet & Dry	Average Precip. (Increase or Decrease)	NO	YES (incr) YES (decr)	YES (incr) YES (decr)
	River flooding	NO	NO	NO
	Heavy precip & pluvial flood	NO	NO	YES in a few regions
	Landslide	NO	NO	NO
	Aridity	NO	NO	NO
	Hydrologic Drought	NO	NO	NO
	Agricultural & ecological drought	NO	NO	NO
	Fire weather	NO	NO	NO
Wind	Average wind speed	NO	NO	NO
	Severe wind storm	NO	NO	NO
	Tropical cyclone	NO	NO	NO
	Sand and dust storm	NO	NO	NO
Snow and Ice	Snow, glacier & ice sheet	NO	YES in a few regions	YES Arctic snow
	Permafrost	YES	YES	YES
	Lake & river ice	NO	YES	YES

	Arctic sea ice	YES	YES	YES
	Antarctic sea ice	NO	YES	YES
	Heavy snowfall and ice storm	NO	NO	NO
	Hail	NO	NO	NO
	Snow avalanche	NO	NO	NO
Coastal	Relative sea level	NO	YES	YES
	Coastal flood	NO	NO	NO
	Coastal erosion	NO	NO	NO
Open Ocean	Average ocean temperature	YES	YES	YES
	Marine heat wave	NO	NO	NO
	Ocean acidity	NO	YES	YES
	Ocean salinity	YES	YES	YES
	Dissolved oxygen	YES (Pacific & S. Ocean)	YES	YES
Other	Air pollution weather	NO	NO	NO
	Solar or IR radiation at surface	NO	NO	NO

Table 8.2.1. IPCC AR6 summary of the probable emergence of an anthropogenic signal above natural climate variability for all global or regional "climate impact drivers" (CIDs) of concern for humans and ecosystems in response to increasing atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations (primarily CO₂). Source: Table adapted from report of Working Group I, Table 12.12). Red = high confidence; yellow = medium confidence; green = no anthropogenic signal detectable above natural variability (50% confidence).

Taking wind as an example, the IPCC claims that an anthropogenic signal has NOT emerged in average wind speeds, severe windstorms, tropical cyclones, or sand and dust storms, and none are expected to emerge this century even under an extreme emissions scenario. The same applies to drought and fire weather. This table alone suffices to illustrate the gap between IPCC expert assessments of extreme weather and discussions in the popular media and political arenas. As we show below the Table reflects longstanding conclusions of the IPCC and other assessment bodies. In the next few sections we will simply present without comment excerpts from past assessment reports.² In selecting these excerpts, we've focused on the highest-level summaries to avoid accusations of bias through "cherry picking".

²In these excerpts we have added **bold-face** emphasis, while *italicized* emphasis on confidence terms appears in the original sources. Citations in quoted text can be found in the underlying reports but are not reproduced here.

8.2.73 Hurricanes and Tropical Cyclones

The AR6 assessed this topic as follows.

AR6: There is *low confidence* in most reported long-term (multidecadal to centennial) trends in TC frequency or intensity-based metrics due to changes in the technology used to collect the best-track data. (Chapter 11, p. 1585)

AR6: It is *likely* that the global proportion of major (Category 3–5) tropical cyclone occurrence has increased over the last four decades. . . . There is *low confidence* in long-term (multidecadal to centennial) trends in the frequency of all-category tropical cyclones. (SPM A.3.4)

AR6: A subset of the best-track data corresponding to hurricanes that have directly impacted the United States since 1900 is considered to be reliable, and shows **no trend in the frequency of U.S. landfall events**. (Chapter 11 Summary, p. 1585)

Hurricane strength records for the North Atlantic and the Western Pacific go back to 1950 and the record does not show an increase in either total or major TCs. Figure 8.3.1 was published by Roger Pielke Jr. as an update to the Best Track data series originally presented in Weinkle et al. (2012).

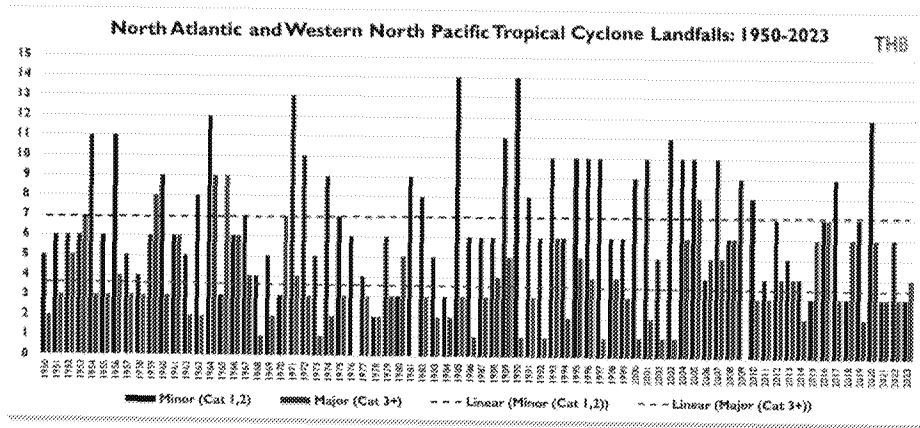


Figure 8.3.1. Tropical Cyclone Landfalls. Source: [HYPERLINK "<https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/global-tropical-cyclones>"], Weinkle et al. (2012)

Similarly, Figure 8.3.2 (Maue 2025, [HYPERLINK "<https://climatlas.com/tropical/>"]) shows that both all hurricanes and major hurricanes have not become more common since 1980, the period of rapidly growing human influences. In fact, both numbers have trended down slightly since the 1990s:

Commented [A2]: Use the Climate Atlas of Dr. Peter Maue

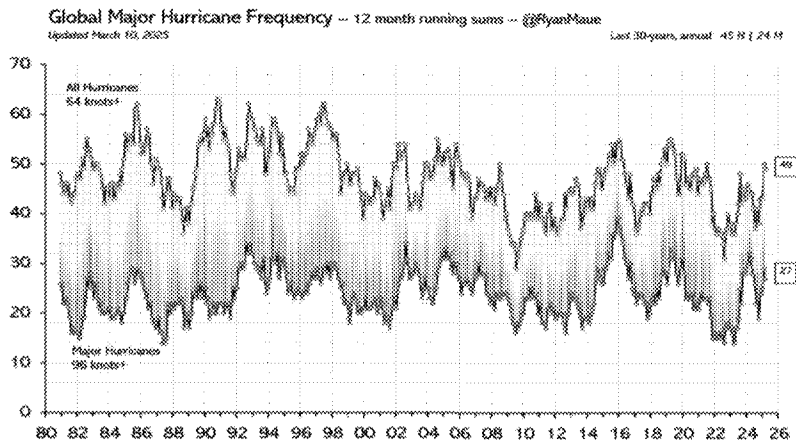


Figure 8.3.2: Global hurricane frequency. Source: Maue (2025)

A metric that combines the number, duration, and strength of TCs is the Accumulated Cyclone Energy (ACE) Index maintained at Colorado State University, shown in Figure 8.3.3. It clearly shows no long-term increase, in fact declining slightly since 1990.

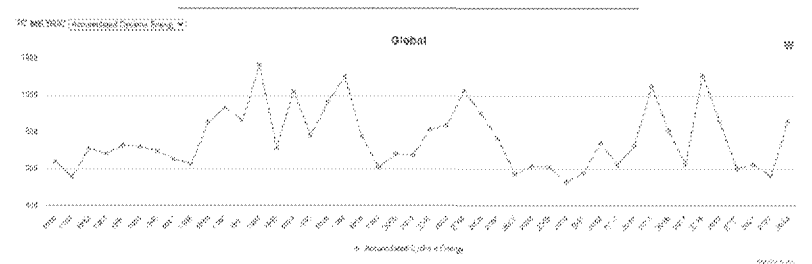


Figure 8.3.3: Global Accumulated Cyclone Energy. Source: Klotzbach (2025)

[HYPERLINK "<https://tropical.atmos.colostate.edu/Realtime/index.php?arch&loc=global>"]

Note that Tu et al. (2024) report that the Power Dissipation Index (PDI), another different measure that combines hurricane number, duration, and strength, has either remained unchanged or has declined in all global oceanic basins since the mid-1990s.

Today's global climate simulations are too coarse to project changes in TCs directly. Rather, projections are derived from finer "downscaled" simulations or proxies involving sea surface temperatures, winds, and aerosols. By those methods, a warming climate is expected to show declining hurricane formation rates. (Chand et al. 2022). Climate models also project fewer Tropical Cyclones under future global warming, and even though models project they will increase in strength, the annual averages of rainfall maxima decline (Stansfield et al. 2020).

8.3 Tornadoes SREX (p. 159):

There have been no significant trends observed in global tropical cyclone frequency records, including over the present 40-year period of satellite observations (e.g., Webster et al., 2005). Regional trends in tropical cyclone frequency have been identified in the North Atlantic, but the fidelity of these trends is debated (Holland and Webster, 2002; Landsea, 2007; Mann et al., 2007a). Different methods for estimating undercounts in the earlier part of the North Atlantic tropical cyclone record provide mixed conclusions (Chang and Guo, 2007; Mann et al., 2007b; Kunkel et al., 2008; Vecchi and Knutson, 2008). Regional trends have not been detected in other oceans (Chan and Xu, 2009; Kubota and Chan, 2009; Callaghan and Power, 2011). It thus remains uncertain whether any observed increases in tropical cyclone frequency on time scales longer than about 40 years are robust after accounting for past changes in observing capabilities (Knutson et al., 2010).

AR5 (pp. 216-17):

Current data sets indicate no significant observed trends in global tropical cyclone frequency over the past century and it remains uncertain whether any reported long-term increases in tropical cyclone frequency are robust after accounting for past changes in observing capabilities (Knutson et al., 2010). No robust trends in annual numbers of tropical storms, hurricanes and major hurricanes counts have been identified over the past 100 years in the North Atlantic basin. Measures of land-falling tropical cyclone frequency (Figure 2.34) are generally considered to be more reliable than counts of all storms which tend to be strongly influenced by those that are weak and/or short lived. Callaghan and Power (2011) find a statistically significant decrease in Eastern Australia land-falling tropical cyclones since the late 19th century although including 2010/2011 season data this trend becomes non-significant (i.e., a trend of zero lies just inside the 90% confidence interval). Significant trends are not found in other oceans on shorter time scales (Chan and Xu, 2009; Kubota and Chan, 2009; Mohapatra et al., 2011; Weinkle et al., 2012), although Grinstead et al. (2012) find a significant positive trend in eastern USA using tide gauge data from 1923–2008 as a proxy for storm surges associated with land-falling hurricanes. Differences between tropical cyclone studies highlight the challenges that still lie ahead in assessing long-term trends.

In summary, this assessment does not revise the SREX conclusion of low confidence that any reported long-term (centennial) increases in tropical cyclone activity are robust after accounting for past changes in observing capabilities. More recent assessments indicate that it is unlikely that annual numbers of tropical storms, hurricanes and major hurricanes counts have increased over the past 100 years in the North Atlantic basin. Evidence, however, is for a virtually certain increase in the frequency and intensity of the strongest tropical cyclones since the 1970s in that region.

AR6 (p. 1585)

There is low confidence in most reported long-term (multidecadal to centennial) trends in TC frequency or intensity-based metrics due to changes in the technology used to collect the best-track data. This should not be interpreted as implying that no physical (real) trends exist, but rather as indicating that either the quality or the temporal

length of the data is not adequate to provide robust trend detection statements, particularly in the presence of multidecadal variability.

There are previous and ongoing efforts to homogenize the best-track data (Elsner et al., 2008; Kossin et al., 2013, 2020; Choy et al., 2015; Landsea, 2015; Emanuel et al., 2018) and there is substantial literature that finds positive trends in intensity-related metrics in the best-track during the "satellite period", which is generally limited to the past ~40 years (Kang and Elsner, 2012; Kishitawal et al., 2012; Kossin et al., 2013, 2020; Mei and Xie, 2016; Zhao et al., 2018; Tauleale and Tsuboki, 2019). When best-track trends are tested using homogenized data, the intensity trends generally remain positive, but are smaller in amplitude (Kossin et al., 2013; Holland and Brayera, 2014). Kossin et al. (2020) extended the homogenized TC intensity record to the period 1979–2017 and identified significant global increases in major TC exceedance probability of about 6% per decade.² In addition to trends in TC intensity, there is evidence that TC intensification rates and the frequency of rapid intensification events have increased within the satellite era (Kishitawal et al., 2012; Balaguru et al., 2018; Bhatia et al., 2018). The increase in intensification rates is found in the best-track as well as the homogenized intensity data.

A subset of the best-track data corresponding to hurricanes that have directly impacted the United States since 1900 is considered to be reliable, and shows no trend in the frequency of U.S. landfall events (Knutson et al., 2019).

AR6: [O]bservational trends in tornadoes, hail, and lightning associated with severe convective storms are **not robustly detected** due to insufficient coverage of the long-term observations. There is *medium confidence* that the mean annual number of tornadoes in the USA has remained relatively constant. (Chapter 11, section 11.7.3, p. 1594)

As noted there is no evidence of trends in US tornadoes or extreme convective storms. Extreme precipitation will be discussed further below.

8.34 Temperature extremes

The AR6 assessment focused on the period after 1950 and reported increasing trends in heat wave frequency and intensity. The NCA17 however noted that heat wave activity in the US reached a peak in the 1930s.

²The underlined text referenced a study (Kossin et al. 2020) that later retracted a portion of its findings. Those authors assembled a data set on global TC incidence spanning 1979 to 2017 from which they claimed that the global fraction of TCs reaching major status (Cat 3–5) rose from 27% during 1979–1997 to 31% during 1998–2017 and that the increase was statistically significant. However, closer examination of their results showed a significant increase only in the North Atlantic (18% to 34%) whereas changes in all other basins (Eastern Pacific, Western Pacific, North Indian, South Indian, South Pacific) were not statistically significant. In a subsequent correction ([HYPERLINK "<https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2021573117>"]), Kossin et al. stated that the global probability of observing a major TC rose from 34% during 1979–1997 to 37% in the later period and that the evidence for statistical significance was now weaker. Nevertheless, the authors claimed that the correction did not affect their conclusions.

AR6: “It is *virtually certain* that hot extremes (including heatwaves) have become **more frequent** and **more intense** across most land regions since the 1950s, while cold extremes (including cold waves) have become less frequent and less severe” (SPM, A3.1)

AR6: “In North America, there is very robust evidence for a *very likely* increase in the intensity and frequency of hot extremes and decrease in the intensity and frequency of cold extremes for the whole continent, though there are substantial spatial and seasonal variations in the trends. Minimum temperatures display warming consistently across the continent, while there are more contrasting trends in the annual maximum daily temperatures in parts of the USA.” (Chapter 11, p 1550)

NCA17: “Changes in warm extremes are more nuanced than changes in cold extremes. For instance, the warmest daily temperature of the year **increased** in some parts of the West over the past century, but there were **decreases** in almost all locations east of the Rocky Mountains. In fact, all eastern regions experienced a net **decrease**, most notably the Midwest (about 2.2°F [1.2°C]) and the Southeast (roughly 1.5°F [0.8°C]).” (pp. 190-191)

NCA17: “Since the mid-1960s, there has been only a very slight increase in the warmest daily temperature of the year (amidst large interannual variability). Heat waves (6-day periods with a maximum temperature above the 90th percentile for 1961–1990) increased in frequency until the mid-1930s, became considerably less common through the mid-1960s, and increased in frequency again thereafter. As with warm daily temperatures, heat wave magnitude reached a **maximum in the 1930s**.” (pp. 190-191)

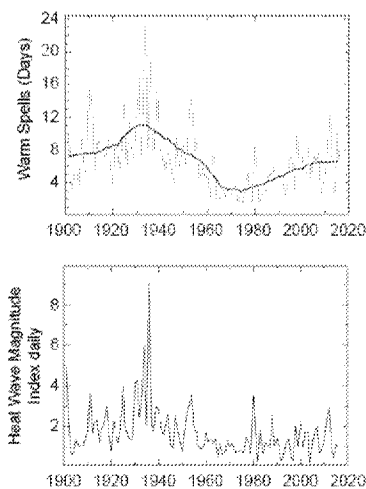


Figure 8.34.1: US Heat waves since 1900. Source: NCA17 Figure 6.4

8.34.1 Temperatures in the US are becoming less extreme

Daily maximum temperatures in the warm season (TMax, May-Sep) and daily minimum temperatures in the cold season (TMin, Dec-Mar) are available beginning in Dec 1898 (126 years). The dataset consists of 1,211 CONUS stations designated as United States Historical Climate Network

or USHCN stations (see Figure 8.34.42; Quinlan et al. 1987, Karl et al. 1990). These stations were selected by NOAA as having the fewest problematic issues with gaps, station moves and instrument changes. Where gaps still exist, nearby stations (bias-corrected) were merged so that the median volume of data available for a station is 98%. Although there are certainly errors in the dataset, with over 1,000 stations we can have relatively high confidence in any underlying signal that might be discovered.

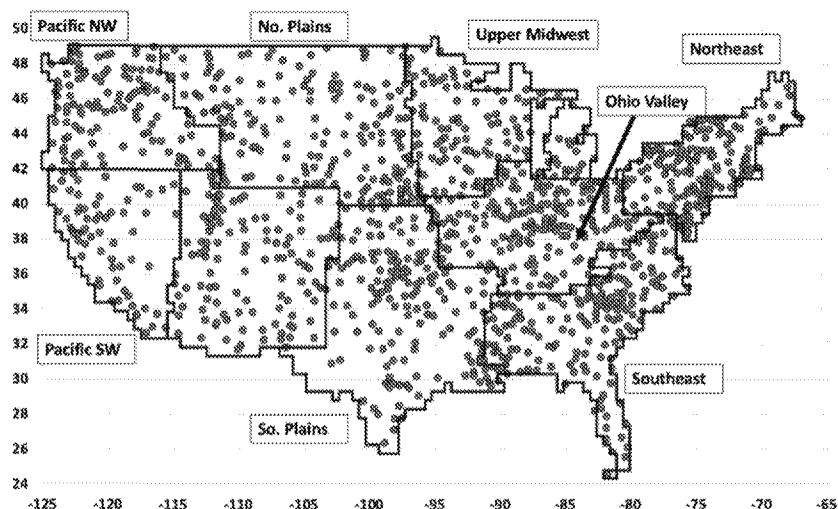


Figure 8.34.42 Locations of USHCN temperature stations. Source: USHCN.

We begin with the question of whether the occurrence of daily record high or low temperatures changed has changed since Dec. 1898. Each warm-season has 153 days (1 May to 30 Sep) and each cold-season has 122 days (1 Dec to 31 Mar). For each station and day, we calculated the year in which the record highest (lowest) temperature occurred. With 126 years of observations, if there were no temperature trends over time, the expected number of records for TMax would be 1.21 ($=153/126$) per station per year and for TMin 0.96 ($=122/126$) per station per year. Figure 8.4.43.3 indicates the observed distribution in time of the occurrence of these extreme events.

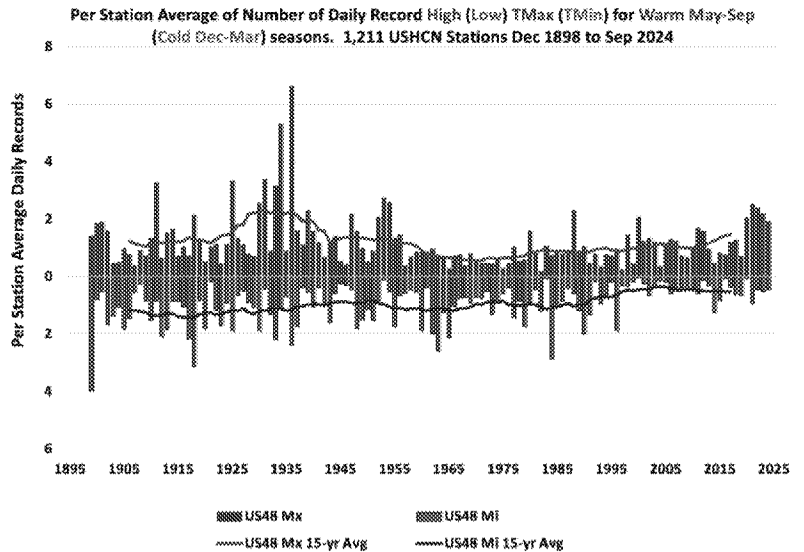


Figure 8.34.23 Number of daily record High (red) and Low (blue) for warm and cold seasons in the CONUS. The lines represent the 15-year running, centered average. Source: 1,211 USHCN stations supplemented as needed to achieve a minimum of 92% of observations in the 126-year period since Dec 1898.

The results indicate a common feature in many metrics of warm-season extremes in the CONUS - the exceptional heat of the 1920s and especially the 1930s, peaking in 1936. On a per-station average, 60% of the TMax records and 59% of the TMin records occurred in the first half of the period (1899-1961).

On the cold side, the Valentine's Day Arctic outbreak in Feb 1899 stands as the most extensive cold extreme experienced by the CONUS, with 1917 2nd. The frequency of cold records has declined, especially over the last quarter of the period in which only 13% of the extreme cold events were measured. In contrast, 25% of the extreme TMax records were achieved in the last quarter in accordance with statistical expectations. These general features have been noted in past assessments (IPCC AR5, IPCC AR6, NCA4, NCA5). Combining the two records the overall reduction in numbers of both cold and hot extremes over the past century indicates a climate less prone to extremes.

This pattern is also shown in Figure 8.34.343. For each station and for each year the hottest warm season and coldest cold-season temperatures were calculated and converted to anomalies relative to the station's long term warm and cold season (respectively) averages. Then the differences between these were computed by station and geographically-averaged over all stations, thus yielding an annual measure of the expected range of local extreme temperatures for each year. Figure 8.4.444 shows the 15-year trailing average of this measure which has clearly declined over the past century.

Commented [A3]: Does this include a correction for varying station density? If not, it should just read "averaged".

**Yearly difference between hottest day in summer and coldest night in winter
Conterminous US, 15-year trailing average**

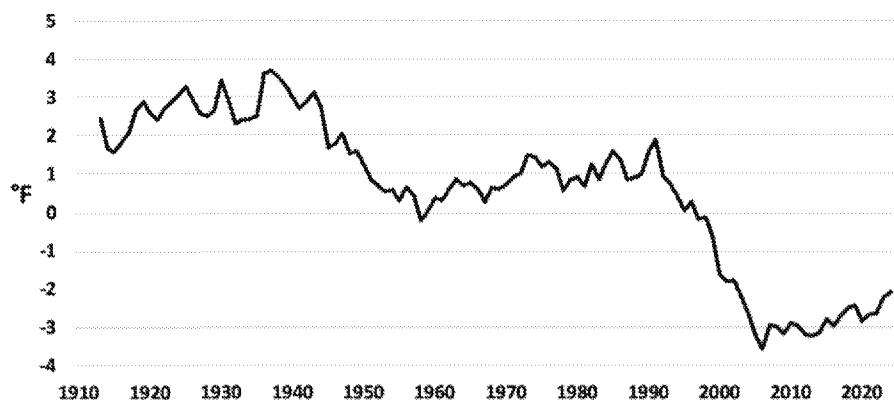


Figure 8.34.34. 15-year trailing average of the difference each year of each station's hottest warm-season TMax and coldest cold-season TMin relative to the long-term average. Source: USHCN, author calculations.

The average difference for each station between the hottest summer TMax and coldest winter TMin has declined about 5°F in the past 126 years. The decline is due mostly to warming winter TMin, but a decline in the magnitude of summer TMax is also a factor. The rise in TMin has been strongly related to the growing presence of manufactured surfaces around the weather stations over the last 100+ years (Spencer et al. 2025).

Summarizing Figures 8.4.4.2.3 and 8.4.2.3.4.4 while temperature extremes are regularly experienced in the US and attract a great deal of media attention, long term records show the US climate has become less extreme over time (milder) when measured in terms of the range between warm season maxima and cold season minima.

8.4.4.2 Exceedances of a heat threshold

Under the heading of "The Risk of Temperature Extremes is Changing", the most recent US National Climate Assessment report (NCA5) notes the increase in a threshold metric of number of days at or above 95°F, stating,

"The western US has been particularly affected by extreme heat since the 1980s ... experiencing a larger increase in days over 95°F, as would be expected given the greater warming in that region relative to the eastern US. Several major heatwaves have affected the US since 2018, including a record-shattering event in the Pacific Northwest in 2021."

Are the occurrences of 95°F days changing? In a climate as varied as that of CONUS, threshold statistics can be misleading. A region with many stations that have near 95°F TMax average temperatures in the summer might see large swings in the metric when only small changes in average temperature occur. Elsewhere with stations that either rarely or virtually always achieve 95°F TMax temperatures, a small change will not impact the results much at all. In the past 126 years, the average CONUS station experienced 129 days exceeding 95°C per 6-yr period, but the regional values range from 278 in the Southern Plains to 9 in the Northeast. Thus, one needs to view such threshold analyses with caution.

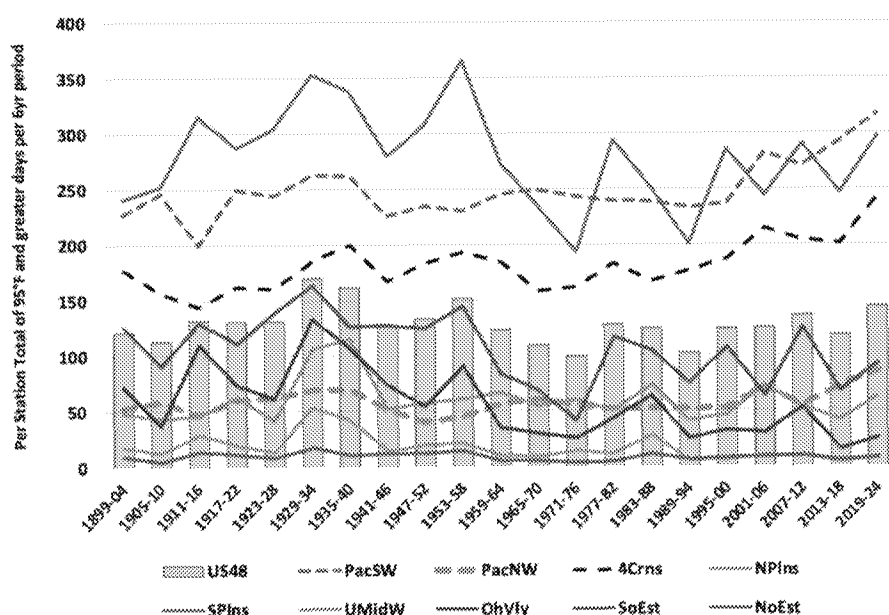


Figure 8.4.334.45. Total number of days $\geq 95^\circ\text{F}$ in 6-yr periods, US 48 (bars) and regions (lines). Source: USHCN, author calculations.

In Fig. 8.4.334.45 we see that only three of the nine regions, all in the West, have experienced upward trends in the number of 95°F or hotter days (dashed lines). The CONUS as a whole has not and the other six regions have experienced declines.

The Pacific NW heatwave of 2021 is referenced as of the NCA5 claim, an event we examine more closely in Section 6.4. The evidence indicates it was a "black swan" event; i.e., a single, unprecedented event in the record, not part of a pattern of increasing extreme heat. For example, the 5-day average tropospheric grid-point temperature anomaly over the Pacific NW during that event was $+10.8^\circ\text{C}$, the

most extreme NH grid point summer anomaly in the 46 years from over 4 million grids. In contrast, the global anomaly during that time was virtually zero (+0.03 C, Mass et al. 2024).

The heading "The Risk of Temperature Extremes is Changing" suggests positive trends are now being observed in threshold temperatures on a widespread basis, but that is not evidenced in the combined CONUS results of the figures above.

8.4.334.3 Heatwaves

Heatwaves (consecutive days that exceed an extreme threshold) have a greater societal impact than a single daily record. We measure "Heatwave Days" here as the count of all days in May-Sep each year that exceed the 90th percentile and that lie within a run of at least six consecutive days. This is equivalent to the method used in NCA5 except that the reference period here is the entire record 1899-2024 while NCA5 truncated the reference period to 1961-1990, a cool time. That truncation boosts positive results (days exceeding the 90th percentile) in periods warmer than the reference period, especially starting in 1960 and moving to the present (see *Urban Influences* below).

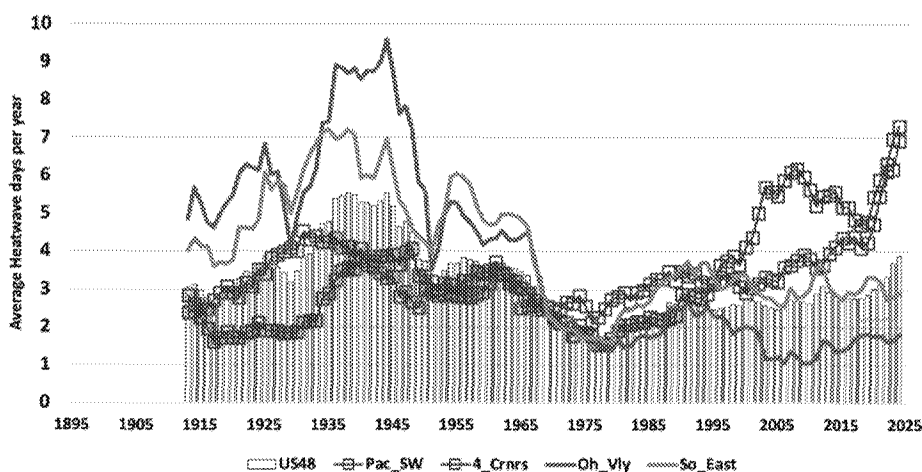


Figure 8.4.434.56 15-year trailing average of number of heatwave days per year per station in the CONUS (bars) and four regions: Pac SW (purple squares, CA, NV), 4_Crnrs (red squares, AZ, NM, UT, CO), Oh Vly (blue, MO, IL, KY, TN, IN, OH, WV) and So East (green, MS, AL, GA, FL, SC, NC, VA).

Figure 8.4.434.56 indicates again the excessive heat of the first half of the 20th century, primarily in the eastern two-thirds of the nation, as seen in the regional values for the Ohio Valley and the Southeast as examples. The West has seen a recent increase of heatwave days and the two regions with the highest number are shown, the Pacific Southwest and the Four-Corners (NCA5). This indicates that the background warm season circulation favored heatwaves in the eastern portions of the country in the first half of the 20th century, but in the 21st century the patterns have favored

heatwaves in the West. For CONUS as a whole, heatwaves are no more common today than they were a century ago.

Of interest here is the regional variation of this metric. The four northern regions (Pacific NW, Northern Plains, Upper Midwest, and Northeast) on average experience 15 to 27 heatwave days per 15-year period. In contrast, the five southern regions (Pacific Southwest, 4-Corners, Southern Plains, Ohio Valley and Southeast) see 37 to 54 such days, essentially twice as many. This suggests the summer circulation pattern is more prone to stationary events in the southern regions while transient systems in the northern regions are more common and thus cut short these potentially longer events.

8.3.4.4 Urban influences

The NCA5 directs readers to the website [HYPERLINK "https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves"] (USGCRP 2023) to view the number of urban heatwaves by decade from the 1960s. The figure shows a monotonic increase in each decade from 2 occurrences per year in the 1960s to 6 in the 2020s. The definition of a heatwave is an unusual but practical measure of human discomfort - a period of at least 2 consecutive days when the minimum apparent temperature (combination of temperature and humidity) exceeds the 85th percentile. Note too, the dataset is limited to the 50 largest U.S. cities.

These increasing values since 1960 presented in USGCRP (2023) are entirely reasonable, but are unrelated to GHG emissions for at least two reasons. Urbanization in these cities is a major factor in the rise of TMin relative to co-located TMax and relative to TMin at rural stations. Also, the 1960s was the coldest decade and 1970s the second coldest decade since the 1910's, so this starting date preconditions the time series to show increases. This does not dismiss the real rise in nighttime temperatures in major U. S. cities and the societal impacts associated with these changes. However, we note for a variety of reasons, that summer TMax (especially in rural areas) serves as better response variable for detecting potential changes in heatwaves influenced by changes in the background climate due, for example, to increasing GHGs (Christy et al. 2009). For the CONUS as a whole, the evidence in this section suggests GHG emissions have had little-to-no effect on heatwaves.

8.4 Tornadoes

AR6: [O]bservational trends in tornadoes, hail, and lightning associated with severe convective storms are **not robustly detected** due to insufficient coverage of the long-term observations. There is *medium confidence* that the mean annual number of tornadoes in the USA has remained relatively constant. (Chapter 11, section 11.7.3, p. 1594)

As noted there is no evidence of trends in US tornadoes or extreme convective storms. Extreme precipitation will be discussed below.

8.4.5.5 Extreme precipitation

The IPCC AR6 assessed that an increase in heavy precipitation has been observed in data starting in the 1950s.

AR6: "The frequency and intensity of heavy precipitation events have **increased** since the 1950s over most land area for which observational data are sufficient for trend analysis (high confidence)." (SPM A3.2)

AR6: "In North America, there is robust evidence that the magnitude and intensity of extreme precipitation has *very likely* increased since the 1950s. Both [one-day maximal] and [5-day maxima] have significantly increased in North America during 1950-2018 "(Chapter 11, p. 1560)

However other data sources indicate less evidence of increasing extreme precipitation when examined over a longer time scale.

Figure 8.45.1 shows that US long term data from NOAA shows an insignificantly increasing tendency toward extreme wetness (+0.001% per year)

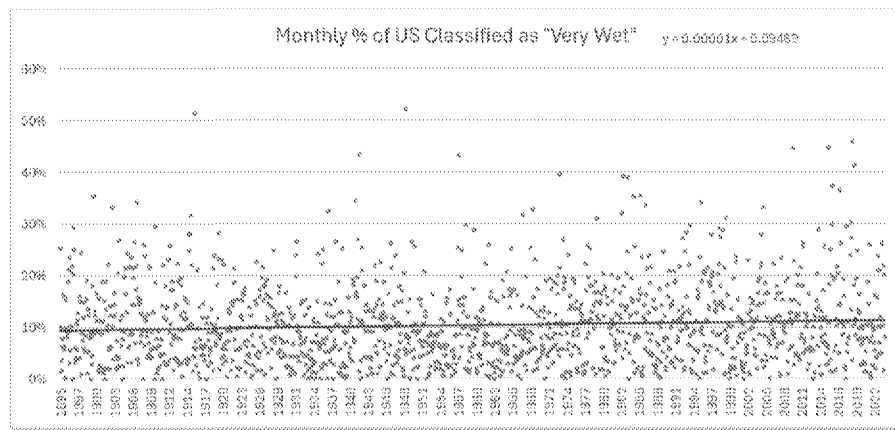
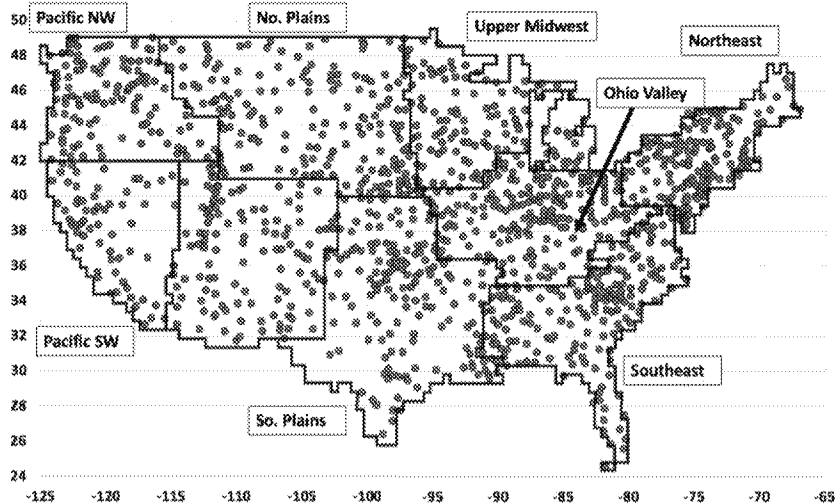


Figure 8.45.1: Long term US wetness (%). Source: NOAA [HYPERLINK "<https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/uspa/wet-dry/0/>"]

Because precipitation involves a discrete phase change (water vapor to liquid), it is stochastic and episodic in character and requires careful statistical treatment to understand variability over long time periods (see 8.1 Introduction). The US National Climate Assessments (NCA4, NCA5) have highlighted an increase in the occurrence of the heaviest precipitation events (defined in different ways) primarily in the eastern half of the CONUS, especially the Northeast, when starting in either 1901 or 1958. Interestingly, the regional variations indicate that the largest increases in extreme events are in the Northeast and the smallest in the West, a trend counter to the changes in temperature extremes.

Commented [A4]: Stochasticity and LTP are really different things, but we somehow conflate them in this sentence. Or am I missing something?

Commented [A5R4]: By removing the 'therefore' I think we are now not conflating them.



McKittrick and Christy (2019) examined long-term and consistent station observations of daily precipitation to test some of these NCA claims for the Southeast and West Coast. When the time series were extended back in time (as far as 1872 in some cases) or when starting later (1978), there were no significant trends for either region.

For this report we updated these findings with similarly constructed observations from 29 stations on the Pacific Coast (1893ff from San Diego CA to Blaine WA) and -24 stations in the humid Southeast (1872ff from Austin TX to Washington DC), and also adding 21 stations in the Northeast (1888ff from Buffalo NY to Gardiner ME). The results of applying the analysis of McKittrick and Christy (2019) were as follows.

[will generate map of stations -RM]

Pacific region:

- Average precipitation trend is significant (downwards) in Astoria, insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant in Big Sur, insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant in Aberdeen and Big Sur and negative and significant in Newport (insignificant elsewhere).
- Averaged over all stations in the region none of these three trend parameters is statistically significant.

Southeast region:

- The trend in average precipitation is positive and significant in Mobile and Quitman, insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant in Mobile, insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant in Vicksburg and Norfolk, insignificant elsewhere.
- Averaged over all stations in the region none of these three trend parameters is statistically significant.

Northeast region:

- The trend in average precipitation is positive and significant in 9 of 21 locations and in the region averaged overall.
- The trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant in Portland, Albany and Buffalo, insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant in Portland and Gardiner, insignificant elsewhere.
- Averaged over all stations in the region the trend parameters for variance and maximum precipitation are not statistically significant.

Pacific Coast heavy rainfall events

The Pacific Coast receives considerable precipitation from Atmospheric River (AR) events which often last more than a day or two (e.g., Gershunov et al. 2017, Pan et al. 2024). The worst-known such event in recent history was the ArkStorm that occurred between December 1861 and January 1862, which dumped nearly 10 feet of rain in parts of California and submerged the entire Central Valley for weeks under as much as 15 feet of water (Brewer 1930, Null and Hulbert 2007). Paleoclimate research has found six megastorms more severe than 1861–1862 in California during the last 1800 years, occurring at intervals of 300 years or so (Porter et al. 2011).

SIDEBAR: Perils of short data records

San Francisco provides a good case study of the limitation of using short historical samples to characterize natural variability of extreme events. Suppose we use a 130-year sample of daily San Francisco precipitation from 1895 to 2024 and we look for 3-day, 5-day, 14-day and 30-day rainfall records. The results are as shown in Table 8.2.

Event	Record (inches)	Year
3-day	6.94	2023
5-day	8.55	2023
14-day	12.62	2023
30-day	18.93	1998

Table 8.2: Extreme rainfall records, San Francisco, 1895–2024.

The records all cluster in the more recent data. 2023 appears to be an exceptional year and since it is near the end of the sample it might suggest that the climate has shifted into a more hazardous state, perhaps as a result of human influences.

But the picture is very different if we use a sample that begins 45 years earlier, in 1850. Table 8.3 shows that the record-setting events then all happened in the 1860s. Furthermore 2023 is now not even in 2nd place but falls to 3rd or 4th. Also, comparing the records of the two charts the extreme precipitation events in 1862 and 1867 involved considerably more rainfall than the 1998 and 2023 events, with 14- and 30-day totals about 50 percent higher.

Commented [A6]: Check this

Event	Record (inches)	Year	Rank of 130-yr extreme
3-day	8.85	1867	3
5-day	9.80	1867	3
14-day	19.05	1862	4

30-day	28.25	1862	2
--------	-------	------	---

Table 8.3: Extreme rainfall records, San Francisco, 1850-2024.

The range of natural variability is made even more remarkable when paleoclimate evidence is examined. Porter et al. (2011) discovered that in the past 1,800 years at least six megastorms were more intense than the devastating 1861-62 ArkStorm that struck the region. Evidently such extreme events have impacted the region about every 300 years, though not since 1895.

This example illustrates the limitations of using relatively short climate periods (~130 years) to assess the character and range of natural variability in general and of extreme events in particular. Accurate representation of the full range of natural variability is necessary for any attribution analyses (see 6.4). Infrastructure planners, emergency management institutions and attribution scientists would understand the significant mischaracterization of the magnitude of a future extreme if based only on the last 130 years. In this case, a single time-sample of 130 years provides an underestimation of the extreme value by up to 50% determined when adding only 45 more years of observations. Compared to millennial-scale paleoclimate evidence, an even greater underestimation would occur. An important lesson is that the climate can deliver great surprises on its own, even without human influences.

We examine occurrences of 5-day deluges as follows. In a 130-year span there are 26 5-year intervals. At each location we computed the 5-day precipitation totals throughout the year and selected the 26 highest values. A single year may have more than one of the 26 heaviest. Each of those can be thought of as 1-in-5yr events. If there are no trends in precipitation then the total number of these events across all stations should be evenly spread out over the years. In Fig. 8.4.55.1 we show the distribution in time of these events. The deluges associated with the massive 1997-98 El Niño event are readily apparent. While erratic, as is typical of these types of precipitation metrics, there is no indication of a tendency to become more frequent over time.

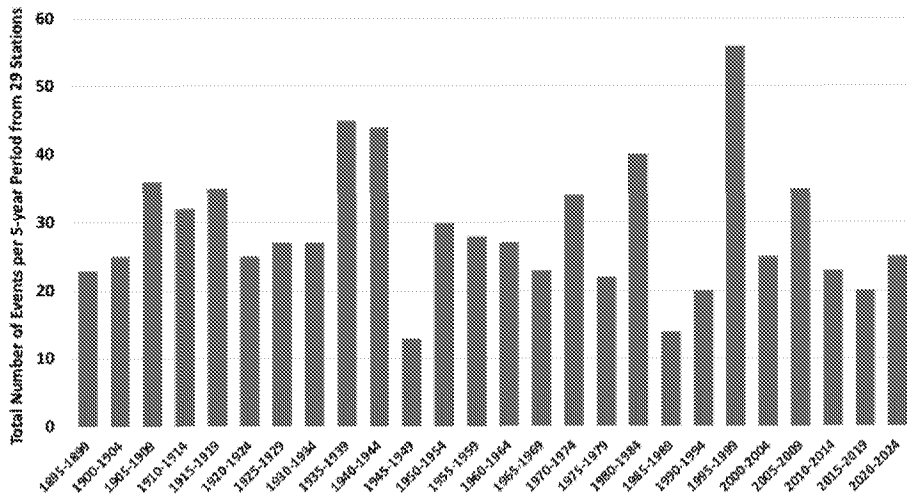


Figure 8.5.24.5. The time distribution by 5-year periods of the 26 heaviest occurrences for each station (i.e., nominal 1-in-5 year event).

Commented [A7]: Suggest this and the following three figures be combined into one with multiple panels.

Southeast heavy rainfall events

The temporal pattern of 5-day totals of the 1-in-5yr heavy events in the humid Southeast (Figure 8.4.65.2) is generally unremarkable, though a cluster of higher values appears in 1995 to 2019. The increase in those years is due largely to the 4 northeastern-most stations of Wilmington NC, Weldon NC, Washington DC, and Norfolk VA. This confirms the pattern indicated in NCA4 and NCA5 of a tendency for an increasing frequency of heavy events, due to a temporal clustering of tropical storms from eastern NC to Maine discussed below. Otherwise, the remaining 20 stations show an unremarkable temporal distribution of heavy events.

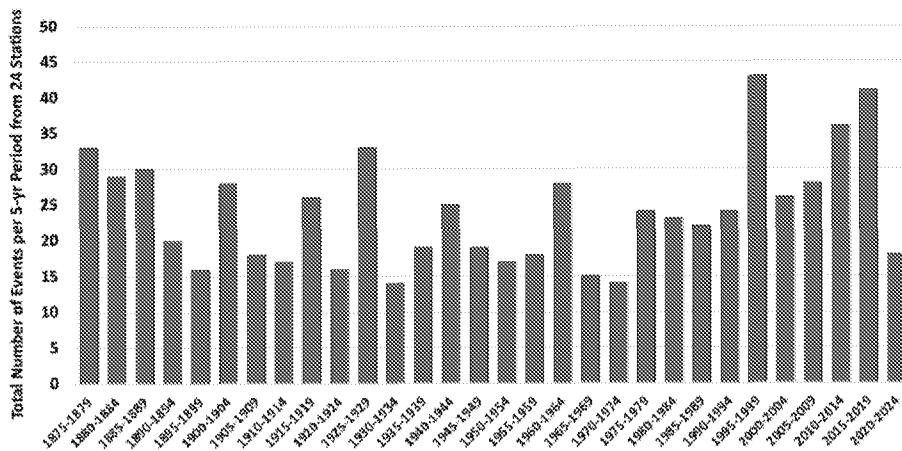


Figure 8.4-65.3. As above but for the 30 heaviest 1-in-5yr events for 24 stations in the humid Southeast from Austin TX to Washington DC in 5-year bins for 1875-2024.

Northwest heavy rainfall events

Fig. 8.4-75.3 shows the 27 (1-in-5yr) heaviest 3-day events for the last 135 years in 21 stations in the Northeast (including Montreal Canada). We use 3-day totals here as this produced the largest variations in time. In this region, 72% of the events occur during June to October and are dominated by tropical incursions of hurricanes, tropical storms or tropical storms that transition to extratropical systems. According to NCA4 and NCA5 this region experienced the largest increases in extreme events, so it shall be examined more closely.

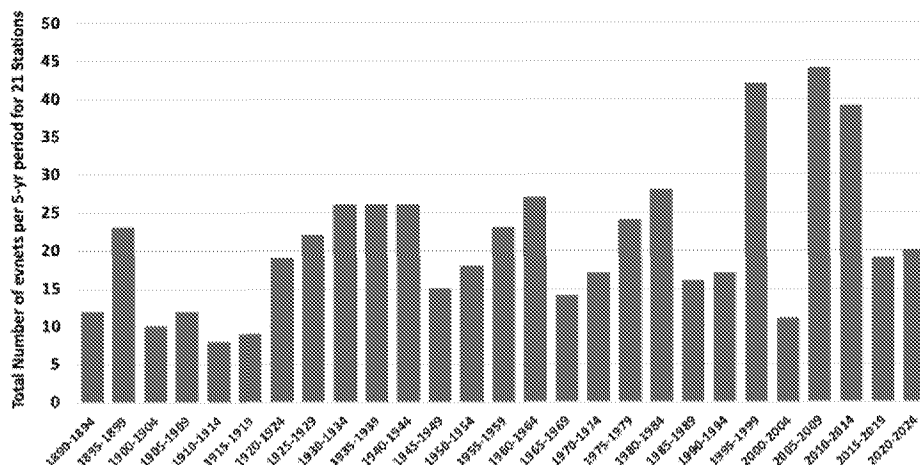


Figure 8.4-75.4. Time distribution of the heaviest 27 (1-in-5yr) heaviest 3-day precipitation events for 21 stations from NY to ME, including Montreal.

Howarth et al. (2019) report differences in the Northeast between two 18-year periods: 1979-96 and 1997-2014 (a similar region as in Fig. 8.16 that includes PA and NJ) of various precipitation extremes. One metric which indicated a dramatic increase (317%) was found for 24-hr events > 6 inches. This high increase is due to the very small numbers of such events of which there were only 6 in the first period and 25 in the second as reported for 58 stations. This high percentage increase is due to the very small numbers of the events; only 6 in the first period and 25 in the second. Most of the stations did not record such an event suggesting these erratic, episodic events over brief, 18-yr periods, need scrutiny by additional statistical methods.

Using the information in Fig. 8.4-75.4 over the same years as Howarth et al. we find a 51% increase in the frequency of heavy events between the two periods. One can see in Fig. 8.16 that it was unfortunate that Howarth et al. ended in 2014 prior to a return to the long-term average of such events.

A feature of Howarth et al. is the use of single day totals which is questionable because extreme events are often spread across the time-of-observation boundary. Thus stations measuring at 0700 LT versus those at Midnight will have differing results for a particular event which would then have major impacts on counting these events. We use the 3-day totals in Fig. 8.4-75.4 to be sure to capture the extent of these extreme downpours. In any case, we can confirm that the period 1997 to 2014 experienced a cluster of heavier events as Howarth et al. have documented.

Howarth's most remarkable claim (317% increase in 6" days) is potentially misleading because it is a threshold statistic (see Section 8.4.2-8.3.2 above) and a ratio of small numbers over a short period. The result is not representative of relative extreme events for the whole region since the majority of stations never experienced a 6" total. Figure 8.4-55.54 above determines the same number of events for each station (27 heaviest events) whose heaviest values ranged from 4.4" to 12.5" and their 27th heaviest values ranged from 3.3" to 5.0". This analysis thus allows each station to

be equally represented. In other words, if there is a region-wide increase in heavy events, it should be seen in the sum of all stations. Note too that the period of record here is 135 years vs. 36 years of Howarth et al. Except for three 5-year periods between 1995 and 2014 there is nothing statistically remarkable about the results in Fig. 8.4.7.

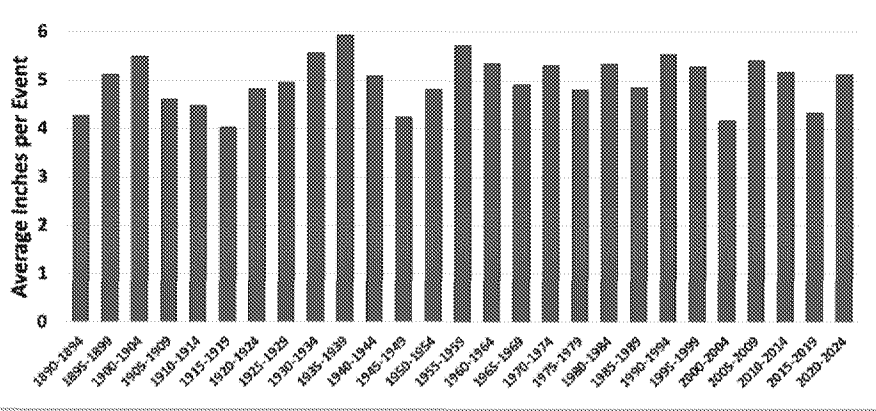


Figure 8.4.85.5. Average amount of precipitation falling in the 1-in-5yr events for the NE stations.

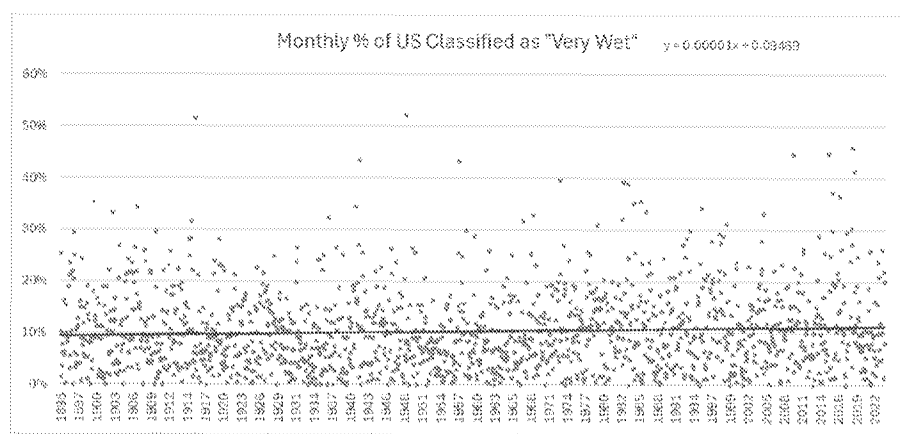
An interesting aspect of Northeast precipitation is that there has been no change in the amount of precipitation per heaviest event, as shown in Fig. 8.4.85.5. The trend is only $+0.02''/\text{decade}$. The highest amount, 1935-39, includes the Great New England Hurricane of 1938, one of the rare major (Category 3 or higher) hurricanes to strike the region. The results in Figs. 8.4.65.4 and 8.4.75.5 suggest that though there was an uptick in the number of events during the period 1995 to 2014, the events, individually, are not becoming more intense.

long et al. (2024) document the increase of tropical influences on precipitation events in the Northeast since 1959 and concluded, "The autumn extreme precipitation trend over the Northeast US is primarily attributed to tropical cyclone-related events since the 1990s." The question then becomes, was the temporal clustering of tropical systems in 1997-2014 which affected the Northeast a response to increasing GHGs? long et al. examined CMIP-6 model output which suggests that there will be fewer such systems in the 21st century but that the intensity of the rainfall events might increase. This conjecture is not seen in Fig. 8.17 where the amount-per-event has remained steady over the 135-year period.

For substantial urban areas there is some evidence to indicate the heaviest rainfall events may be redistributed due to the impact urban infrastructure has on the local weather (e.g., Pielke Sr. et al. 2011, Zhang et al. 2018, Yang et al. 2024). Yang et al. state, "Cities that experience compact development tend to witness larger increases in extreme rainfall frequency over downtown than their rural surroundings, while the anomalies in extreme rainfall frequency diminish for cities with

dispersed development." While this is an important insight to consider, the effect on the specific stations used in this analysis is unknown, or at least not detectable in Fig. 8.17.

In summary, the evidence from the historical record of extreme precipitation events in the CONUS is generally not consistent from region to region so that inferences regarding trends and their projections are wrought with significant uncertainty. In most regions and perhaps all, it is our opinion that the very nature of the erratic and episodic character of extreme precipitation events renders the discovery of statistically significant changes, including a relationship to CO2 concentrations, a result yet to be achieved (McKittrick and Christy 2019).



8.6 Tornadoes

AR6: [O]bservational trends in tornadoes, hail, and lightning associated with severe convective storms are **not robustly detected** due to insufficient coverage of the long-term observations. There is *medium confidence* that the mean annual number of tornadoes in the USA has remained relatively constant. (Chapter 11, section 11.7.3, p. 1594)

As noted there is no evidence of trends in US tornadoes or extreme convective storms.

Figure 8.3.84.1: Long-term US wetness (%). Source: NOAA [HYPERLINK <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/uspa/wet-dry/0/>]

8.2.27 Flooding

Changes in floods were assessed as follows:

AR6: "The SREX assessed *low confidence* for observed changes in the magnitude or frequency of floods at the global scale. This assessment was confirmed by the AR5 report. The SRI 5 found increases in flood frequency and extreme streamflow in some regions, but decreases in other regions. . . [H]ydrological literature on observed flood changes is heterogeneous, focusing at regional and sub-regional basin scales, making it difficult to synthesise at the global and sometimes regional scales." (Chapter 11.5)

AR6: "[T]he seasonality of floods has changed in cold regions where snowmelt dominates the flow regime in response to warming (*high confidence*). Confidence about peak flow trends over past decades on the global scale is *low*." (Chapter 11.5)

NCA 17: "Trends in extreme high values of streamflow are **mixed** across the United States. Analysis of 200 U.S. stream gauges indicates areas of both increasing and decreasing flooding magnitude but does not provide robust evidence that these trends are attributable to human influences" (pp. 240-241)

The absence of detectable US-wide trends in flooding is consistent with the findings in the previous section of absence of coherent changes in extreme precipitation.

SREX (p. 176)

In the United States and Canada during the 20th century and in the early 21st century, there is no compelling evidence for climate-driven changes in the magnitude or frequency of floods.

AR5 (p. 214)

AR4 WGI Chapter 3 (Trenberth et al., 2007) did not assess changes in floods but AR4 WGI concluded that **there was not a general global trend in the incidence of floods** (Kundzewicz et al., 2007). SREX went further to suggest that there was low agreement and thus *low confidence* at the global scale regarding changes in the magnitude or frequency of floods or even the sign of changes.

AR5 WGI assesses floods in regional detail accounting for the fact that trends in floods are strongly influenced by changes in river management (see also Section 2.5.2). Although the most evident flood trends appear to be in northern high latitudes, where observed warming trends have been largest, in some regions no evidence of a trend in extreme flooding has been found, for example, over Russia based on daily river discharge (Shiklomanov et al., 2007). Other studies for Europe (Hannaford and Marsh, 2008; Renard et al., 2008; Petrow and Merz, 2009; Stahl et al., 2010) and Asia (Jiang et al., 2008; Delgado et al., 2010) show evidence for upward, downward or no trend in the magnitude and frequency of floods, so that there is

currently no clear and widespread evidence for observed changes in flooding except for the earlier spring flow in snow-dominated regions (Seneviratne et al., 2012). In summary, there continues to be a lack of evidence and thus low confidence regarding the sign of trend in the magnitude and/or frequency of floods on a global scale.

AR6 (Ch 11 p. 1568)

The SR5X (Seneviratne et al., 2012) assessed low confidence for observed changes in the magnitude or frequency of floods at the global scale. This assessment was confirmed by the AR5 report (Hartmann et al., 2013). The SR15 (Hoegh-Guldberg et al., 2019) found increases in flood frequency and extreme streamflow in some regions, but decreases in other regions. While the number of studies on flood trends has increased since the AR5 report, and there were also new analyses after the release of SR15 (Berghuis et al., 2017; Blöschl et al., 2019; Gudmundsson et al., 2019), hydrological literature on observed flood changes is heterogeneous, focusing at regional and sub-regional basin scales, making it difficult to synthesise at the global and sometimes regional scales.

In summary, the seasonality of floods has changed in cold regions where snow melt dominates the flow regime in response to warming (high confidence). Confidence about peak flow trends over past decades on the global scale is low, but there are regions experiencing increases, including parts of Asia, southern South America, the northeast USA, northwestern Europe, and the Amazon, and regions experiencing decreases, including parts of the Mediterranean, Australia, Africa, and the southwestern USA.

US NCA17, pp. 240-41:

"The IPCC AR5 did not attribute changes in flooding to anthropogenic influence nor report detectable changes in flooding magnitude, duration, or frequency. Trends in extreme high values of streamflow are mixed across the United States. Analysis of 200 U.S. stream gauges indicates areas of both increasing and decreasing flooding magnitude but does not provide robust evidence that these trends are attributable to human influences."

The complex mix of processes complicates the formal attribution of observed flooding trends to anthropogenic climate change and suggests that additional scientific rigor is needed in flood attribution studies. As noted above, precipitation increases have been found to strongly influence changes in flood statistics. However, in U.S. regions, no formal attribution of precipitation changes to anthropogenic forcing has been made so far, so indirect attribution of flooding changes is not possible. Hence, no formal attribution of observed flooding changes to anthropogenic forcing has been claimed."

8.2.3 Heatwaves

AR5 (p. 212 WG1)

Table 2.13 shows that there has been a likely increasing trend in the frequency of heatwaves since the middle of the 20th century in Europe and Australia and across much of Asia where there are sufficient data. However, confidence on a global scale is medium owing to lack of studies over Africa and South America but also in part owing to differences in trends depending on how heatwaves are defined (Perkins et al., 2012). Using monthly means as a proxy for heatwaves Coumou et al. (2013) and Hansen et al. (2012) indicate that record-breaking temperatures in recent decades substantially exceed what would be expected by chance but caution is required when making inferences between these studies and those that

deal with multi-day events and/or use more complex definitions for heatwave events. There is also evidence in some regions that periods prior to the 1950s had more heatwaves (e.g., over the USA, the decade of the 1930s stands out and is also associated with extreme drought conditions (Peterson et al., 2013) whereas conversely in other regions heatwave trends may have been underestimated owing to poor quality and/or consistency of data (e.g., Della-Marta et al. (2007a) over Western Europe; Kuglitsch et al. (2009, 2010) over the Mediterranean). Recent available studies also suggest that the number of cold spells has reduced significantly since the 1950s (Donat et al., 2013a, 2013c).

In summary, new analyses continue to support the AR4 and SREX conclusions that since about 1950 it is very likely that the numbers of cold days and nights have decreased and the numbers of warm days and nights have increased overall on the global scale, that is, for land areas with sufficient data. It is likely that such changes have also occurred across most of North America, Europe, Asia and Australia.

NCA17 (pp. 190–191)

Changes in warm extremes are more nuanced than changes in cold extremes. For instance, the warmest daily temperature of the year increased in some parts of the West over the past century (Figure 6.3), but there were decreases in almost all locations east of the Rocky Mountains. In fact, all eastern regions experienced a net decrease (Table 6.2), most notably the Midwest (about 2.2°F [1.2°C]) and the Southeast (roughly 1.5°F [0.8°C]). The decreases in the eastern half of [the] Nation, particularly in the Great Plains, are mainly tied to the unprecedented summer heat of the 1930s Dust Bowl era, which was exacerbated by land-surface feedbacks driven by springtime precipitation deficits and land mismanagement. However, anthropogenic aerosol forcing may also have reduced summer temperatures in the Northeast and Southeast from the early 1950s to the mid-1970s, and agricultural intensification may have suppressed the hottest extremes in the Midwest.

Since the mid-1960s, there has been only a very slight increase in the warmest daily temperature of the year (amidst large interannual variability). Heat waves (6-day periods with a maximum temperature above the 90th percentile for 1961–1990) increased in frequency until the mid-1930s, became considerably less common through the mid-1960s, and increased in frequency again thereafter (Figure 6.4). As with warm daily temperatures, heat wave magnitude reached a maximum in the 1930s.

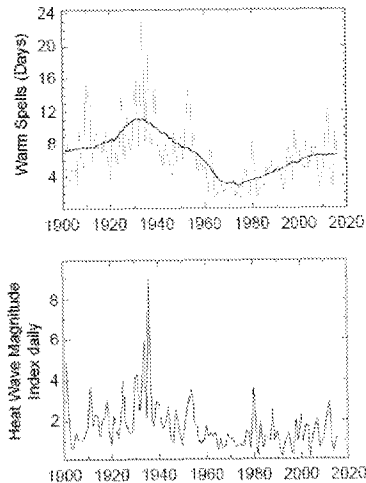


Figure 8.2.1: US Heat waves since 1900. Source: NCA17 Figure 6.4

AR6 (p. 1550)

In North America (Table 11.19), there is very robust evidence for a *very likely* increase in the intensity and frequency of hot extremes and decrease in the intensity and frequency of cold extremes for the whole continent, though there are substantial spatial and seasonal variations in the trends. Minimum temperatures display warming consistently across the continent, while there are more contrasting trends in the annual maximum daily temperatures in parts of the USA (Figure 11.9; Lee et al., 2014; van Oldenborgh et al., 2019; Dunn et al., 2020).

8.2.4 Extreme snowfall events

Note: extreme snowfall events in the US northeast are assessed in relation to winter Extratropical Cyclone (ETC) activity.

AR6 Ch 11, p. 1593

There is *high confidence* that snowfall associated with winter ETCs will decrease in the future, because increases in tropospheric temperatures lead to a lower proportion of precipitation falling as snow (O’Gorman, 2014; Rhoades et al., 2018; Zarzycki, 2018). However, there is *medium confidence* that extreme snowfall events associated with winter ETCs will change little in regions where snowfall will be supported in the future (O’Gorman, 2014; Zarzycki, 2018).

8.2.5 Extreme precipitation

SREX (p. 142)

Recent studies have updated the assessment of the AR4, with more regional results now available (Table 3-2). Overall, this additional evidence confirms that **more locations and studies show an increase than a decrease in extreme precipitation, but that there are also wide regional and seasonal variations**, and trends in many regions are not statistically significant (Table 3-2). Based on station data from Canada, the United States, and Mexico, Peterson et al. (2008a) reported that heavy precipitation has been increasing over 1950-2004, as well as the average amount of precipitation falling on days with precipitation.

AR5 (pp. 213-14)

In summary, further analyses continue to support the AR4 and SREX conclusions that **it is likely that since 1951 there have been statistically significant increases in the number of heavy precipitation events (e.g., above the 95th percentile) in more regions than there have been statistically significant decreases, but there are strong regional and subregional variations in the trends**. In particular, many regions present statistically non-significant or negative trends, and, where seasonal changes have been assessed, there are also variations between seasons (e.g., more consistent trends in winter than in summer in Europe). The overall most consistent trends towards heavier precipitation events are found in central North America (very likely increase) but assessment for Europe shows likely increases in more regions than decreases.

AR6 (p. 1560)

In North America, there is robust evidence that the magnitude and intensity of extreme precipitation has *very likely* increased since the 1950s. Both [one-day maximal] and [5-day maximal] have significantly increased in North America during 1950-2018 (Sun et al., 2020, also Figure 11.13). There is, however, regional diversity. In Canada, there is a lack of detectable trends in observed annual maximum daily (or shorter duration) precipitation (Shephard et al., 2014; Mekis et al., 2015; Vincent et al., 2018).

NC417 pp. 213-14:

Detectability of trends (compared to internal variability) for a number of precipitation metrics over the continental United States has been examined; **however, trends identified for the U.S. regions have not been clearly attributed to anthropogenic forcing**. One study concluded that increasing precipitation trends in some north-central U.S. regions and the extreme annual anomalies there in 2013 were at least partly attributable to the combination of anthropogenic and natural forcing. **Based on current evidence, it is concluded that detectable but not attributable increases in mean precipitation have occurred over parts of the central United States**. Formal detection-attribution studies indicate a human contribution to extreme precipitation increases over the continental United States, but confidence is low based on those studies alone due to the short observational period, high natural variability, and model uncertainty.

In summary, based on available studies, it is concluded that for the continental United States there is *high confidence* in the detection of extreme precipitation increases, while there is *low confidence* in attributing the extreme precipitation changes purely to anthropogenic forcing.

8.2.6 Tornadoes and severe convective storms

Severe convective storms are convective systems that are associated with extreme phenomena such as tornadoes, hail, heavy precipitation (rain or snow), strong winds, and lightning.

The assessment of changes in severe convective storms in SREX (Chapter 3, Seneviratne et al., 2012) and AR5 (Chapter 12, Collins et al., 2013) is limited and focused mainly on tornadoes and hail storms. The SREX assessed that **there is low confidence in observed trends in tornadoes and hail** because of data inhomogeneities and inadequacies in monitoring systems. Subsequent literature assessed in the Climate Science Special Report (Kossin et al., 2017) led to the assessment of the observed tornado activity over the 2000s in the USA, with a decrease in the number of days per year with tornadoes and an increase in the number of tornadoes on these days (*medium confidence*). However, **there is low confidence in past trends for hail and severe thunderstorm winds**. Climate models consistently project environmental changes that would support an increase in the frequency and intensity of severe thunderstorms that combine tornadoes, hail, and winds (*high confidence*), but there is *low confidence* in the details of the projected increase.

In summary, because the definition of severe convective storms varies depending on the literature and the region, it is not straightforward to make a synthesizing view of observed trends in severe convective storms in different regions. In particular, **observational trends in tornadoes, hail, and lightning associated with severe convective storms are not robustly detected** due to insufficient coverage of the long-term observations. There is *medium confidence* that the mean annual number of tornadoes in the USA has remained relatively constant, but their variability of occurrence has increased since the 1970s, particularly over the 2000s, with a **decrease in the number of days per year, and an increase in the number of tornadoes on these days** (*high confidence*). Detected tornadoes have also increased in Europe, but the trend depends on the density of observations.

In summary, **it is extremely difficult to detect and attribute changes in severe convective storms**. There is limited evidence that extreme precipitation associated with severe convective storms has increased in some cases.

8.2.7 Hurricanes and Tropical Cyclones

SREX (p. 150):

There have been no significant trends observed in global tropical cyclone frequency records, including over the present 40-year period of satellite observations (e.g., Webster et al., 2005). Regional trends in tropical cyclone frequency have been identified in the North Atlantic, but the fidelity of these trends is debated (Holland and Webster, 2002; Landsea, 2007; Mann et al., 2007a). Different methods for estimating undercounts in the earlier part of the North Atlantic tropical cyclone record provide mixed conclusions (Chang and Gao, 2007; Mann et al., 2007b; Kunkel et al., 2008; Vecchi and Knutson, 2008). Regional trends have not been detected in other oceans (Chan and Xu, 2009; Kubota and Chan, 2009; Callaghan and Power, 2011). It thus remains uncertain whether any observed increases in tropical cyclone frequency on time scales longer than about 40 years are robust after accounting for past changes in observing capabilities (Knutson et al., 2010).

AR5 (pp. 216–17):

Current data sets indicate no significant observed trends in global tropical cyclone frequency over the past century and it remains uncertain whether any reported long-term increases in tropical cyclone frequency are robust after accounting for past changes in observing capabilities (Knutson et al., 2010). No robust trends in annual numbers of tropical storms, hurricanes and major hurricanes counts have been identified over the past 100 years in the North Atlantic basin. Measures of land-falling tropical cyclone frequency (Figure 2.24) are generally considered to be more reliable than counts of all storms which tend to be strongly influenced by those that are weak and/or short-lived. Callaghan and Power (2011) find a statistically significant decrease in Eastern Australia land-falling tropical cyclones since the late 19th century although including 2010/2011 season data this trend becomes non-significant (i.e. a trend of zero lies just inside the 90% confidence interval). Significant trends are not found in other oceans on shorter time scales (Chan and Xu, 2009; Kubota and Chan, 2009; Mohapatra et al., 2011; Weinkle et al., 2012), although Grinstead et al. (2012) find a significant positive trend in eastern USA using tide-gauge data from 1920–2009 as a proxy for storm surges associated with land-falling hurricanes. Differences between tropical cyclone studies highlight the challenges that still lie ahead in assessing long-term trends.

In summary, this assessment does not revise the SREX conclusion of low confidence that any reported long-term (centennial) increases in tropical cyclone activity are robust after accounting for past changes in observing capabilities. More recent assessments indicate that it is unlikely that annual numbers of tropical storms, hurricanes and major hurricanes counts have increased over the past 100 years in the North Atlantic basin. Evidence, however, is for a virtually certain increase in the frequency and intensity of the strongest tropical cyclones since the 1970s in that region.

AR6 (p. 1585)

There is low confidence in most reported long-term (multidecadal to centennial) trends in TC frequency or intensity-based metrics due to changes in the technology used to collect the best-track data. This should not be interpreted as implying that no physical (real) trends exist, but rather as indicating that either the quality or the temporal length of the data is not adequate to provide robust trend detection statements, particularly in the presence of multidecadal variability.

There are previous and ongoing efforts to homogenize the best-track data (Elsner et al., 2008; Kossin et al., 2012, 2020; Chey et al., 2015; Landsea, 2015; Emanuel et al., 2019) and there is substantial literature that finds positive trends in intensity-related metrics in the best-track during the “satellite period”, which is generally limited to the past 40 years (Kang and Elsner, 2012; Kishitani et al., 2012; Kossin et al., 2012, 2020; Mei and Xie, 2016; Zhao et al., 2018; Tawale and Teubok, 2019). When best-track trends are tested using homogenized data, the intensity trends generally remain positive, but are smaller in amplitude (Kossin et al., 2012; Holland and Bruyere, 2014). Kossin et al. (2020) extended the homogenized TC intensity record to the period 1979–2017 and identified significant global increases in major TC exceedance probability of about 6% per decade. In

⁴The underlined text referenced a study (Kossin et al. 2020) that later retracted a portion of its findings. Those authors assembled a data set on global TC incidence spanning 1979 to 2017 from which they claimed that the global fraction of TCs reaching major status (Cat 3–5) rose from 27% during 1979–1997 to 31% during 1998–2017 and that the increase was statistically significant. However, closer examination of their results showed a significant increase only in the North Atlantic (18% to 34%) whereas changes in all other basins (Eastern

~~addition to trends in TC intensity, there is evidence that TC intensification rates and the frequency of rapid intensification events have increased within the satellite era (Kishore et al., 2012; Balaguru et al., 2018; Bhatia et al., 2018). The increase in intensification rates is found in the best track as well as the homogenized intensity data.~~

~~A subset of the best track data corresponding to hurricanes that have directly impacted the United States since 1900 is considered to be reliable, and shows no trend in the frequency of U.S. landfall events (Knutson et al., 2019).~~

8.2.968 Droughts

~~Assessments of drought trends were as follows.~~

~~AR6: "Few AR6 regions show observed increases in meteorological drought" (Section 11.9, p. 1575).~~

~~AR6: "Increasing trends in agricultural and ecological droughts have been observed on all continents (*medium confidence*), but decreases only in one AR6 region (*medium confidence*). Increasing trends in hydrological droughts have been observed in a few AR6 regions." (Chapter 11 Summary)~~

~~NCA17: "As a consequence of this increased precipitation, drought statistics over the entire CONUS have declined." (p. 233)~~

~~NCA17: "Recent droughts and associated heat waves have reached record intensity in some regions of the United States; however, by geographical scale and duration, the Dust Bowl era of the 1930s remains the benchmark drought and extreme heat event in the historical record (very high confidence)." (p. 231)~~

~~SREX: "From a paleoclimate perspective, recent droughts are **not unprecedented**, with severe 'megadroughts' reported in the paleoclimatic record for Europe, North America, and Australia." (p. 170)~~

~~US NCA17 REPORT (Ch. 8, Wehner et al. 2017)~~

~~p. 231:~~

~~Recent droughts and associated heat waves have reached record intensity in some regions of the United States; however, by geographical scale and duration, the Dust Bowl era of the 1930s remains the benchmark drought and extreme heat event in the historical record (very high confidence). **While by some measures drought has decreased over much of the continental United States in association with long-term increases in precipitation, neither the precipitation increases nor inferred drought decreases have been confidently attributed to anthropogenic forcing.**~~

~~Pacific, Western Pacific, North Indian, South Indian, South Pacific) were not statistically significant. In a subsequent correction ([HYPERLINK "https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2021573117"]), Kossin et al. stated that the global probability of observing a major TC rose from 34% during 1979-1997 to 37% in the later period and that the evidence for statistical significance was now weaker. Nevertheless, the authors claimed that the correction did not affect their conclusions.~~

The human effect on recent major U.S. droughts is complicated. Little evidence is found for a human influence on observed precipitation deficits, but much evidence is found for a human influence on surface soil moisture deficits due to increased evapotranspiration caused by higher temperatures. (High confidence)

p. 233:

Drought is, of course, directly connected to seasonal precipitation totals. Figure 7.1 shows detectable observed recent changes in seasonal precipitation. In fact, the increases in observed summer and fall precipitation are at odds with the projections in Figure 7.5. As a consequence of this increased precipitation, drought statistics over the entire CONUS have declined.

SREX (p. 170)

From a paleoclimate perspective recent droughts are not unprecedented, with severe 'megadroughts' reported in the paleoclimatic record for Europe, North America, and Australia (Jansen et al., 2007). Recent studies extend this observation to African and Indian droughts (Sinha et al., 2007; Shanahan et al., 2009); much more severe and longer droughts occurred in the past centuries with widespread ecological, political, and socioeconomic consequences. Overall, these studies confirm that in the last millennium several extreme droughts have occurred (Breda and Badeau, 2009; Kallis, 2008; Büntgen et al., 2010).

In North America, there is medium confidence that there has been an overall slight tendency toward less dryness (wetting trend with more soil moisture and runoff; Table 3-2), although analyses for some subregions also indicate tendencies toward increasing dryness. This assessment is based on several lines of evidence, including simulations with different hydrological models as well as PDSI and CDD estimates (Alexander et al., 2006; Andreadis and Lettenmaier, 2006; van der Schrier et al., 2006a; Kunkel et al., 2008; Sheffield and Wood, 2008a; Dai, 2011).

The most severe droughts in the 20th century have occurred in the 1930s and 1950s, where the 1930s Dust Bowl was most intense and the 1950s drought most persistent (Adreadis et al., 2005) in the United States, while in Mexico the 1950s and late 1990s were the driest periods. Recent regional trends toward more severe drought conditions were identified over southern and western Canada, Alaska, and Mexico, with subregional exceptions (Dai, 2011).

SREX (p. 172)

Overall, though new studies have furthered the understanding of the mechanisms leading to drought, there is still relatively limited evidence to provide an attribution of observed changes, in particular given the issues associated with the availability of observational data (Section 3.2.1) and the definition and computation of drought indicators (Box 3-3). This latter point was mostly identified in post-AR4 studies (Box 3-3). Moreover, regions where consistent increases in drought are identified (see 'Observed Changes') are only partly consistent with those where projections indicate an enhancement of drought conditions in coming decades (see next paragraphs). We thus assess that there is medium confidence (see also Section 3.1.5) that anthropogenic influence has contributed to some changes in the drought patterns observed in the second half of the 20th century, based on its attributed impact on precipitation and temperature changes (though temperature can only

be indirectly related to drought trends; see Box 3-3). However **there is low confidence in the attribution of changes in droughts at the level of individual regions.**

AR5 (pp. 214-215)

Based on evidence since AR4, SREX concluded that there were not enough direct observations of dryness to suggest high confidence in observed trends globally, although there was *medium confidence* that since the 1950s some regions of the world have experienced more intense and longer droughts. The differences between AR4 and SREX are due primarily to analyses post-AR4, differences in how both assessments considered drought and updated IPCC uncertainty guidance.

Because drought is a complex variable and can at best be incompletely represented by commonly used drought indices, discrepancies in the interpretation of changes can result. For example, Sheffield and Wood (2008) found decreasing trends in the duration, intensity and severity of drought globally. Conversely, Dai (2011a,b) found a general global increase in drought, although with substantial regional variation and individual events dominating trend signatures in some regions (e.g., the 1970s prolonged Sahel drought and the 1930s drought in the USA and Canadian Prairies). Studies subsequent to these continue to provide somewhat different conclusions on trends in global droughts and/or dryness since the middle of the 20th century (Sheffield et al., 2012; Dai, 2013; Donat et al., 2013c; van der Schrier et al., 2013).

In summary, the current assessment concludes that there is not enough evidence at present to suggest more than low confidence in a global-scale observed trend in drought or dryness (lack of rainfall) since the middle of the 20th century, owing to lack of direct observations, geographical inconsistencies in the trends, and dependencies of inferred trends on the index choice. Based on updated studies, AR4 conclusions regarding global increasing trends in drought since the 1970s were probably overstated. However, it is likely that the frequency and intensity of drought has increased in the Mediterranean and West Africa and decreased in central North America and north-west Australia since 1950.

AR6 (Drought, Observed trends, Section 11.6.2, pp. 1573-75)

p. 1573

Strong precipitation deficits have been recorded in recent decades in the Amazon (2005-2010), south-western China (2009-2010), south-western North America (2011-2014), Australia (1997-2009), California (2014), the middle East (2012-2016), Chile (2010-2015), the Great Horn of Africa (2011), among others (van Dijk et al., 2013; Mann and Gleick, 2015; Rowell et al., 2015; Marengo and Espinoza, 2016; Dai and Zhao, 2017; Garreaud et al., 2017, 2020; Marengo et al., 2017; Brito et al., 2018; Cook et al., 2018). **Global studies generally show no significant trends in SPI time series** (Orlowsky and Seneviratne, 2013; Spinoni et al., 2014), **and in derived drought frequency and severity data** (Spinoni et al., 2019), with very few regional exceptions (Section 11.9 and Figure 11.17).

p. 1574

For AR6 regions, several studies suggest an increase in the frequency and areal extent of soil moisture deficits, with examples in East Asia (Cheng et al., 2015; Y. Qin et al., 2015; Jia et al., 2018), Western and Central Europe (Trnka et al., 2015b), and the Mediterranean (Hanel et al., 2018; Moravec et al., 2019; Markonis et al., 2021). **Nonetheless, some analyses also show no long-term trends in soil drying in some AR6 regions – for example, in Eastern**

North America (Park Williams et al., 2017) and Central North America (Seager et al., 2019), as well as in North Eastern Africa (Kew et al., 2021).

There is evidence based on streamflow records of increased hydrological droughts in East Asia (D. Zhang et al., 2018) and southern Africa (Gudmundsson et al., 2019). In areas of Western and Central Europe and Northern Europe, there is no evidence of changes in the severity of hydrological droughts since 1950 based on flow reconstructions (Caillaud et al., 2017; Barker et al., 2019) and observations (Vicente-Serrano et al., 2019). In North America, depending on the methods, datasets and study periods, there are differences between studies that suggest an increase (Shukla et al., 2015; Udall and Overpeck, 2017) versus a decrease in hydrological drought frequency (Mo and Lettenmaier, 2018), but in general there is strong spatial variability (Poshtiri and Pal, 2016). Streamflow observation reference networks of near-natural catchments have also been used to isolate the effect of climate trends on hydrological drought trends in a few regions, but these show limited trends in Northern Europe and Western and Central Europe (Stahl et al., 2010; Bard et al., 2015; Harrigan et al., 2018), North America (Dudley et al., 2020) and most of Australia, with the exception of Eastern and Southern Australia (X.S. Zhang et al., 2016).

p. 1575

Few AR6 regions show observed increases in meteorological drought (Section 11.9), mostly in Africa and South America (NES: *high confidence*; WAF, CAF, ESAF, SAM, SWS, SSA, SAS: *medium confidence*); a few others show a decrease (WSB, ESB, NAU, CAU, NEU, CNA: *medium confidence*). There are stronger signals indicating observed increases in agricultural and ecological drought (Section 11.9), which highlights the role of increased [evapotranspiration] driven by increased [Atmospheric Evaporative Demand] for these trends (Sections 11.6.2.3, 11.6.2.5). Past increases in agricultural and ecological droughts are found on all continents and several regions (WAF, CAF, WSAF, ESAF, WCA, ECA, EAS, SAU, MED, WCE, NES: *medium confidence*), while decreases are found only in one AR6 region (NAU: *medium confidence*). The more limited availability of datasets makes it more difficult to assess historical trends in hydrological drought at regional scale (Section 11.9). Increasing (MED: *high confidence*; WAF, EAS, SAU: *medium confidence*) and decreasing (NEU, SES: *medium confidence*) trends in hydrological droughts have only been observed in a few regions.

AR6 on Attribution (p. 1577)

There are only two AR6 regions in which there is at least *medium confidence* that human-induced climate change has contributed to changes in meteorological droughts (Section 11.9). In South-western South America (SSW), there is *medium confidence* that human-induced climate change has contributed to an increase in meteorological droughts (Boisier et al., 2016; Garreaud et al., 2020), while in Northern Europe (NEU), there is *medium confidence* that it has contributed to a decrease in meteorological droughts (Gudmundsson and Seneviratne, 2016) (Section 11.9). In other AR6 regions, there is inconclusive evidence in the attribution of long-term trends, but a human contribution to single meteorological events or subregional trends has been identified in some instances. In North America, the human influence on precipitation deficits is complex (Wehner et al., 2017), with low confidence in the attribution of long-term changes in meteorological drought in AR6 regions.

As shown in Figure 8.3.968.1 US long term data (NOAA) shows an insignificantly declining tendency toward extreme dryness (-0.001% per year)

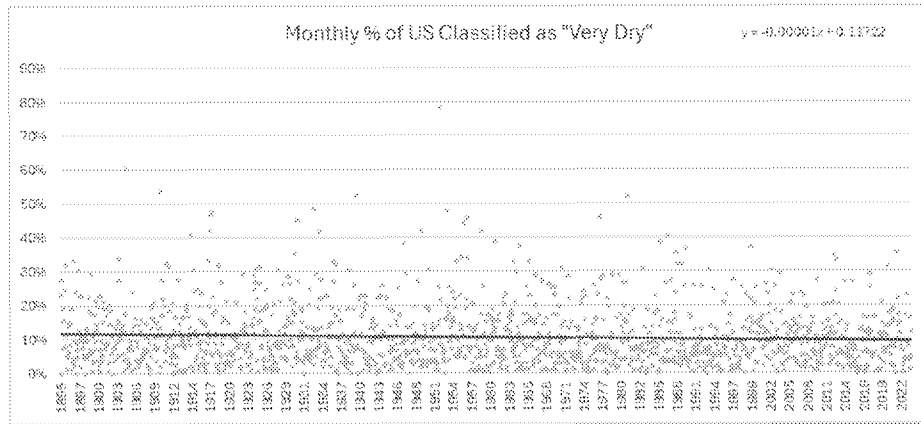


Figure 8.3.968.1: US dryness (%) 1895—2023. Source: NOAA [HYPERLINK "<https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/uspa/wet-dry/0>"]

Kogan et al. (2020) examines a 38-year high-resolution satellite-based drought measure and concludes that global drought has not intensified and is not connected to climate change: "it is possible to state firmly that global and main grain countries' drought area and intensity trends have not been following global climate warmings since 1980's."

8.32 Extreme weather trends at global and continental indicators of scale extreme weather trends

8.32.1 Tropical Cyclones (TCs)

Hurricane strength records for the North Atlantic and the Western Pacific go back to 1950 and the record does not show an increase in either total or major TCs. Figure 8.3.1 was published by Roger Pielke Jr. as an update to the Best Track data series originally presented in Weinkle et al. (2012).

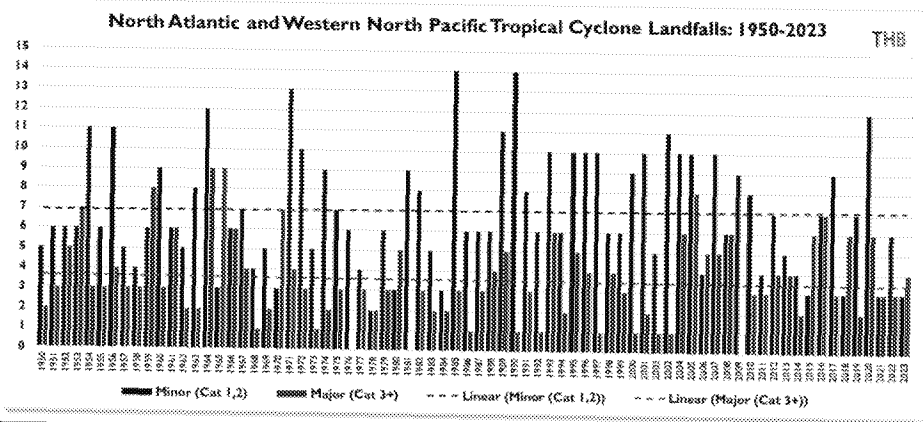


Figure 8.3.1. Tropical Cyclone Landfalls. Source: [HYPERLINK "https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/global-tropical-cyclones"], Weinkle et al. (2012)

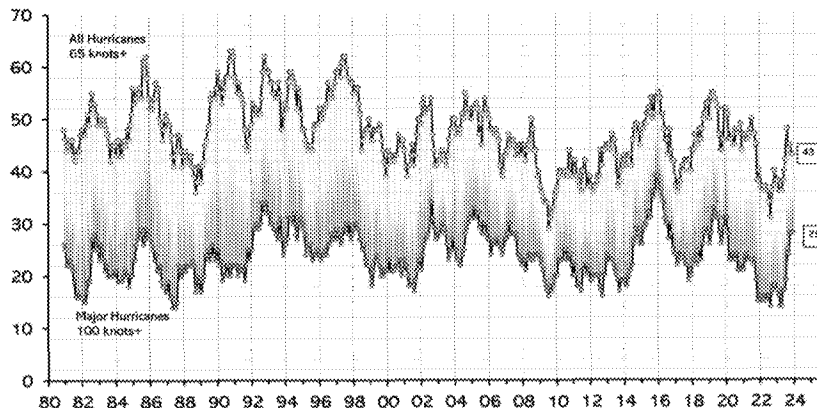
Similarly, [After 1980, as shown in Figure 8.3.2,]Maue 2025, [HYPERLINK "https://climatlas.com/tropical/"] shows that which reproduces data from the Climate Atlas of Dr. Ryan Maue both neither all hurricanes and the total number of hurricanes nor the frequency of major ones hurricanes have not become more common since 1980, the period of rapidly growing human influences. In fact, both numbers have trended down slightly since the 1990s:

Commented [A8]: One the Climate Atlas of Dr. Ryan Maue

Global Major Hurricane Frequency – 12 month running sums – @RyanMaue

Updated December 31, 2023

Last 30-years: 45.7 H | 24.4 M



Global Major Hurricane Frequency – 12 month running sums – @RyanMaue

Updated March 10, 2025

Last 30-years, annual: 45 H | 24 M

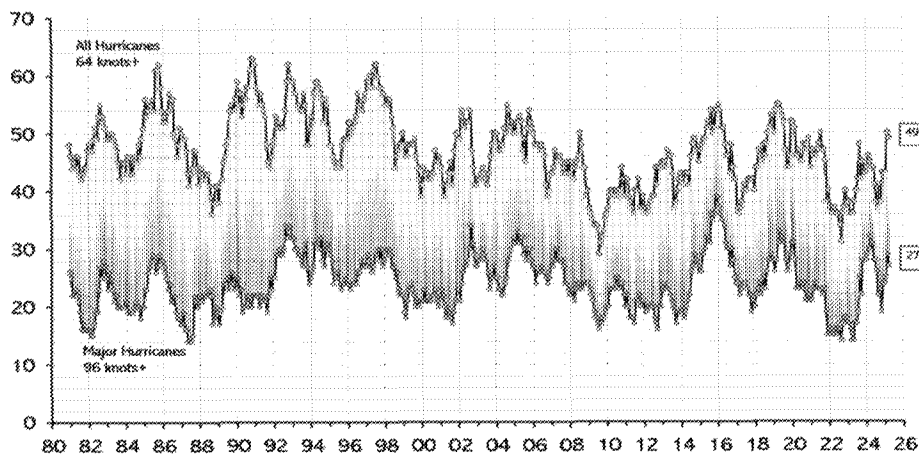


Figure 8.3.2: Global hurricane frequency. Source: Maue (2024/2025)

A metric that combines the number, duration, and frequency strength of TCs is the Accumulated Cyclone Energy (or ACE) Index maintained at Colorado State University, shown in Figure 8.3.3. As is clear, it is also not clearly shows no long-term increase, in fact declining slightly and since 1990 has declined slightly.

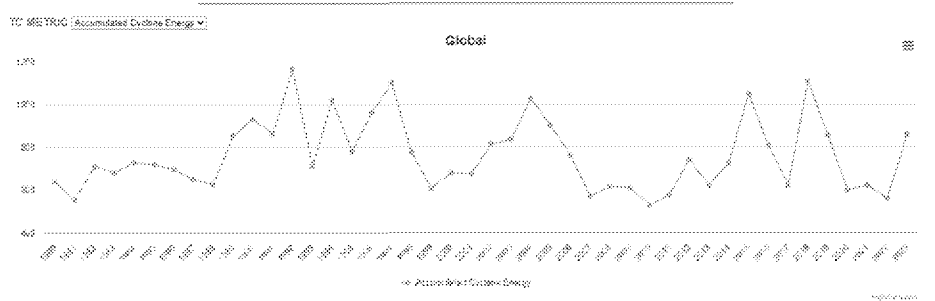


Figure 8.3.3: Global Accumulated Cyclone Energy. Source: Klotzbach (2025)
 [HYPERLINK "<https://tropical.atmos.colostate.edu/Realtime/index.php?arch&loc=global>"]

Note that Tu et al. (2024) report that the Power Dissipation Index (PDI), another different measure of the destructiveness of hurricanes that combines hurricane number, duration, and strength, has either remained unchanged or has declined in all global oceanic basins since the mid-1990s. As is clear, it is also not increasing and since 1990 has declined slightly.

Today's global climate simulations are too coarse to project changes in TCs directly. Rather, projections are derived from finer "downscaled" simulations or proxies involving sea surface temperatures, winds, and aerosols. By those methods, a warming climate is expected to show climate models project declining hurricane formation rates in a warming climate (Chand et al. 2022). Climate models also project fewer Tropical Cyclones under future global warming, and even though models project they will increase in strength, the annual averages of rainfall maxima decline (Stansfield et al. 2020). Note that Tu et al. (2024) report that the Power Dissipation Index (PDI), a measure of the destructiveness of hurricanes, has either remained unchanged or has declined in all global oceanic basins since the mid-1990s.

8.3.279 Wildfires

The IPCC has not provided an assessment of wildfires.

As shown in Figures 8.3.479.1 and 8.3.5 global wildfire activity as measured by European Space Agency peaked over a decade ago and shows a downward trend since this century.

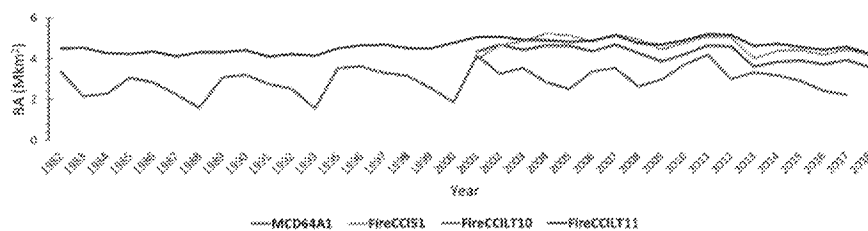


Figure 8.3.4: Global wildfire 1982-2018. Source: Copied from Oton et al. (2021). Note: the different coloured lines represent different data products based on satellites and algorithms used.

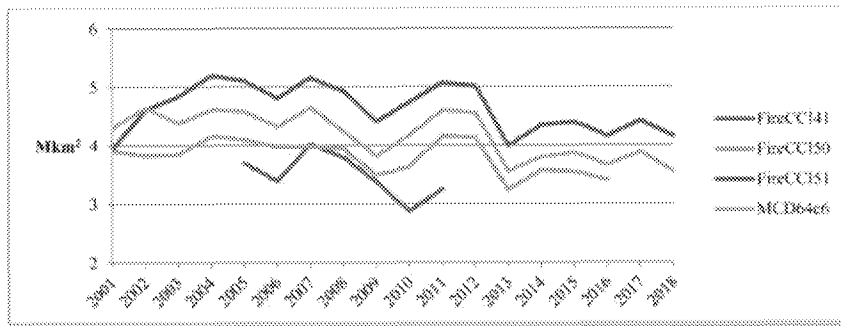


Figure 8.3.579.1: Global wildfire 2001-2018. Source: Copied from Lizundia-Loiola et al. (2021). Note: the different coloured lines represent different data products based on satellites and algorithms used.

US data from the National Interagency Fire Centre (NIFC) from 1926 to 2023 are shown in Figure 8.3.679.2.

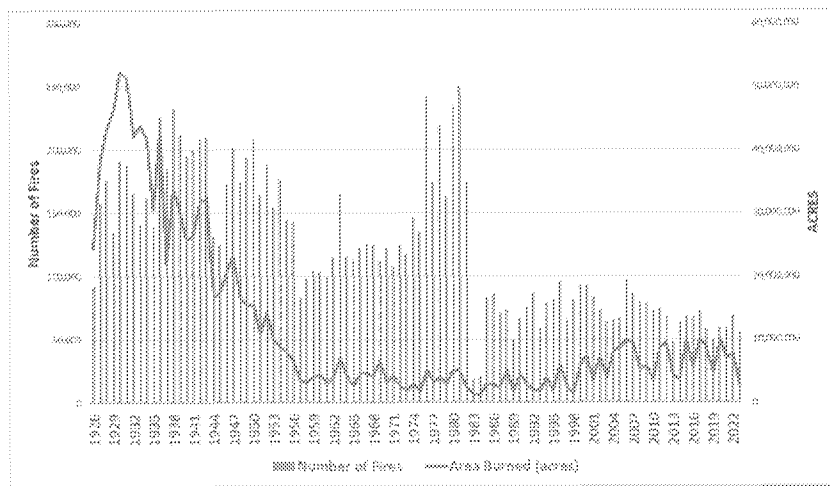


Figure 8.3.679.2: US wildfires 1926 to 2023. Source: National InterAgency Fire Centre data Pre-2017 (archived)

[<file:///C:/Users/Porter%20Hill/Dropbox/Brucehaven/Projects/DoE/Ross%20drafts/Pr>]
e-

Commented [A9]: I thought the trends were due to declining fires in the Amazon, masking any climate-related trend?

Commented [A10R9]: "global area burned appears to have overall declined over past decades, and there is increasing evidence that there is less fire in the global landscape today than centuries ago." Doerr and Santin, Proc Royal Society 2016

2017):%20https:\\web.archive.org\\web\\20200212033452\\https:\\www.nifc.gov\\fireInfo\\fireInfo_stats_totalFires.html"]. 2018-2023: [HYPERLINK "https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/statistics/wildfires"]

Note the NIFC has removed the pre-1960 data from its current website. They claim it is because measurement methods changed after 1960. This explanation seems inadequate since agencies blend temperature and extreme weather data series in other contexts when measurement systems changed. In this case if anything the measurement of wildfires has improved since the early 20th century so any bias will be towards understating early wildfire counts. Nonetheless just focusing on the post-1985 interval the number of fires is not increasing. The area burned did increase but only until about 2007.

It is difficult to establish a natural baseline for wildfire activity because of active fire suppression activity since 1900. Paleoclimatic evidence indicates, however, that past wildfire activity was much higher than at present. Marlon et al. (2012) used sedimentary charcoal layers to reconstruct fire history of western US for the past 1400 years. They also fit a model to predict expected fire activity as a function of climatic conditions. The results are summarized in Figure 8.3.79.3 below (from Figure 2 in their paper).

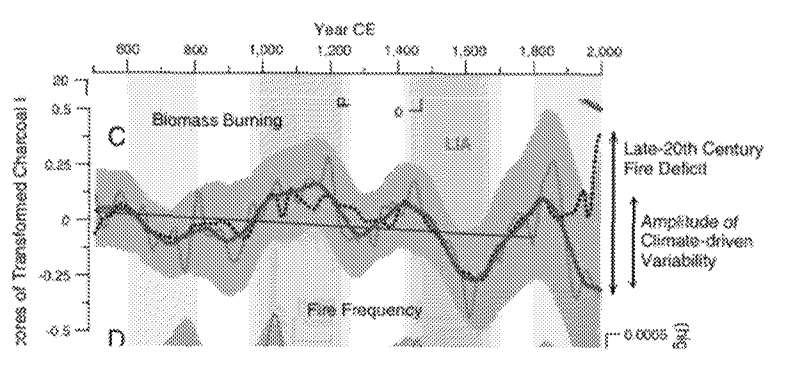


Figure 8.3.79.3 Fire frequency and fire deficit in the US. Source: Copied from Marlon et al. (2012)

In their figure the red line shows the smoothed charcoal record and the black dotted line shows the predicted charcoal record based on the statistical model. The gap at the end implies there has been a growing wildfire deficit over the 20th century. In other words, however much fire was observed in the 20th century it was less than what would have been observed in previous centuries based on the climatic conditions. Parks et al. (2025) likewise find that despite the recent increase in wildfire burn area in North America, a significant wildfire deficit remains relative to historical wildfire regimes there remains a significant wildfire deficit.

8.23.3 Precipitation

Figure 8.2.8 shows that US long-term data from NOAA shows an insignificantly increasing tendency toward extreme wetness (-0.001% per year)

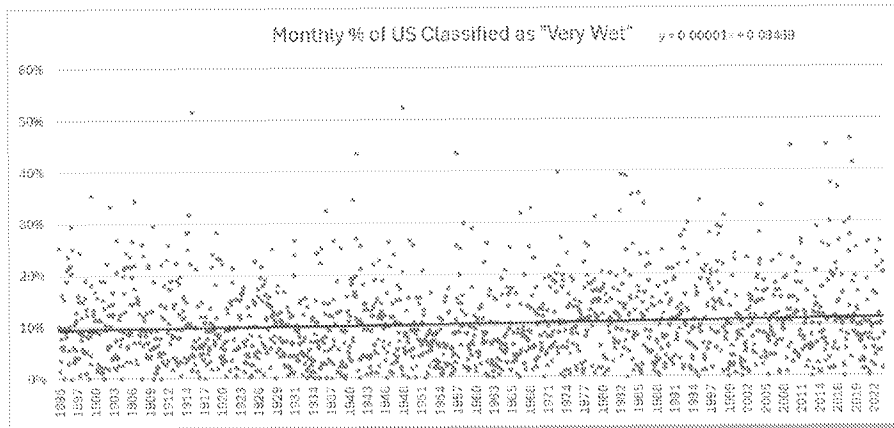


Figure 8.3.8: Long-term US wetness (%) Source: NOAA [HYPERLINK "<https://www.ncsl.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/uspa/wet-dry/0>"]

Precipitation will be discussed further in the review of CONUS data below.

8.23.4 Drought

As shown in Figure 8.3.9 US long-term data (NOAA) shows an insignificantly declining tendency toward extreme dryness (-0.00001% per year)

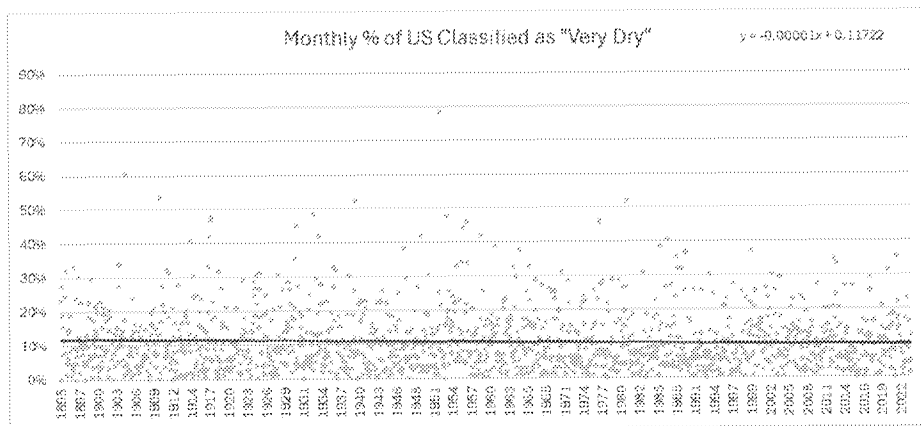


Figure 8.3.9: US dryness (%) 1955-2022 Source: NOAA [HYPERLINK "<https://www.ncsl.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/uspa/wet-dry/0>"]

~~Kogan et al. (2020) examines a 38-year high-resolution satellite-based drought measure and concludes that global drought has not intensified and is not connected to climate change. "It is possible to state firmly that global and main grain countries' drought area and intensity trends have not been following global climate warming since 1990's."~~

~~8.3.4 Analysis of Temperature and precipitation extremes in the Conterminous Contiguous US (CONUS) data on temperature and precipitation extremes~~

~~8.3.4.1 CONUS daily temperatures are becoming less extreme~~

~~Daily maximum temperatures in the warm season (TMax, May-Sep) and daily minimum temperatures in the cold season (TMin, Dec-Mar) are available beginning in Dec 1898 (126 years). [The dataset consists of 1,211 CONUS stations designated as United States Historical Climate Network or USHCN stations (Quinlan et al. 1987, Karl et al. 1990). These stations were selected by NOAA as having the fewest problematic issues with gaps, station moves and instrument changes. Where gaps still exist, nearby stations (bias-corrected) were merged so that the median volume of data available for a station is 98%. Although there are certainly errors certainly reside in the dataset, with over 1,000 stations we can have relatively high confidence in any underlying signal we that might be discovered can be characterized by relatively high confidence.~~

~~We begin with the question of whether the occurrence of daily record high or low temperatures changed has changed since Dec 1898. Each warm season has 153 days (1 May to 30 Sep) and each cold season has 122 days (1 Dec to 31 Mar). For each station and day, we calculated the year in which the record highest (lowest) temperature occurred. With 126 years of observations, if there were no temperature trends over time, the expected number of records for TMax would be 1.21 ($=153/126$) per station per year and for TMin 0.96 ($=122/126$) per station per year. Figure 8.4.110 indicates the observed distribution in time of the occurrence of these extreme events.~~

Commented [A11]: Again, I think we need a map of where the stations are; something like this one:
[HYPERLINK
"https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258660497_Uncertainties_Trends_and_Hottest_and_Coldest_Years_of_US_Surface_Air_Temperature_since_1895_An_Update_Based_on_the_USHCN_V2_TOB_Data/figures?no=1"]
More importantly, it needs to show how you've cut them up into regions.

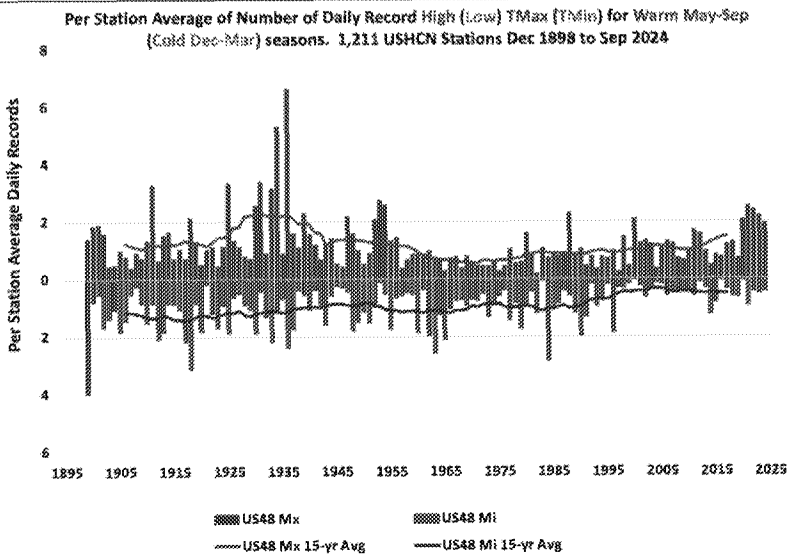
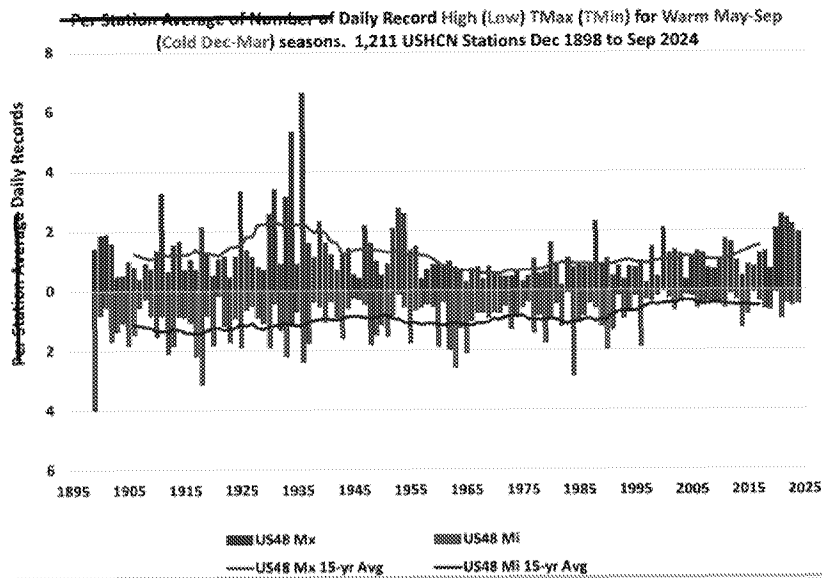


Figure 8.4.110 Number of daily record High (red) and Low (blue) for warm and cold seasons in the CONUS. The lines represent the 15-year running, centered average. Source: 1,211 USHCN stations supplemented as needed to achieve a minimum of 92% of observations in the 126-year period since Dec 1899.

The results indicate a common feature in many metrics of warm-season extremes in the CONUS—the exceptional heat of the 1920s and especially the 1930s, peaking in 1936. On a per-station average, 60% of the TMax records and 59% of the TMin records occurred in the first half of the period (1899–1961).

On the cold-side, the Valentine's Day Arctic outbreak in Feb 1899 stands as the most extensive cold extreme experienced by the CONUS, with 1917–2nd. The frequency of cold records has declined, especially over the last quarter of the period in which only 13% of the extreme cold events were measured. In contrast, 25% of the extreme TMax records were achieved in the last quarter in accordance with statistical expectations. These general features have been noted in past assessments (IPCC AR5, IPCC AR6, NCA4, NCA5). Combining the two records the overall reduction in numbers of both cold and hot extremes over the past century indicates a climate less prone to extremes.

This pattern is also shown in Figure 8.4.211. For each station and for each year the hottest warm season and coldest cold-season temperatures were calculated and converted to anomalies relative to the station's long-term warm and cold season (respectively) averages. Then the differences between these were computed by station and geographically averaged over all stations, thus yielding an annual measure of the expected range of local extreme temperatures for each year. Figure 8.11 shows the 15-year trailing average of this measure which has clearly declined over the past century.

Commented [A12]: Does this include a correction for varying station density? If not, it should just read "averaged".

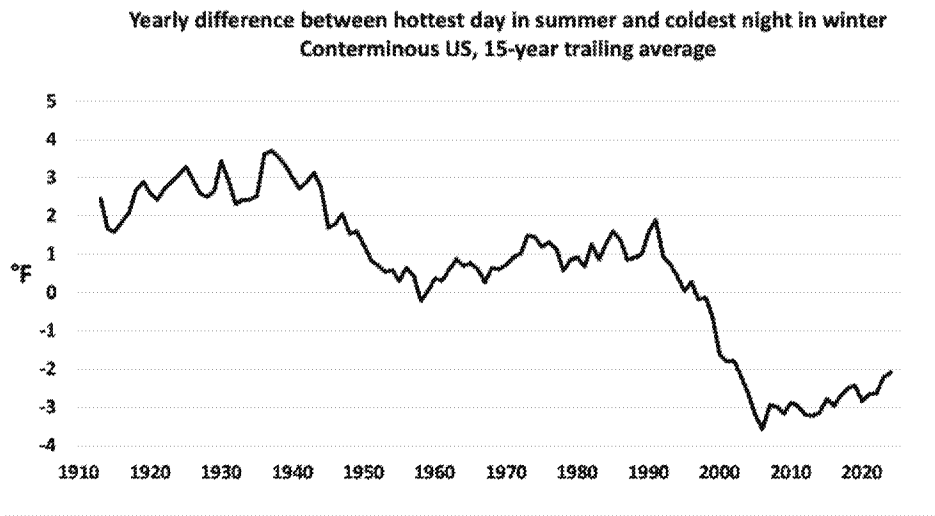


Figure 8.4.211. 15-year trailing average of the difference each year of each station's hottest warm-season TMax and coldest cold-season TMin relative to the long-term average.

The average difference for each station between the hottest summer TMax and coldest winter TMin has declined about 5°F in the past 126 years. The decline is due mostly to warming winter TMin, but

a decline in the magnitude of summer TMax is also a factor. The rise in TMin has been strongly related to the growing presence of manufactured surfaces around the weather stations over the last 100+ years (Spencer et al. 2025).

Summarizing Figures 8.10.4.1 and 8.4.2.11, while temperature extremes are regularly experienced in the US and attract a great deal of media attention, long term records show the US climate has become less extreme over time (milder) when measured in terms of the range between warm season maxima and cold season minima.

8.34.2 Exceedances of a heat threshold

Under the heading of "The Risk of Temperature Extremes is Changing", the most recent US National Climate Assessment report (NCA5) notes the increase in a threshold metric of number of days at or above 95°F, stating,

"The western US has been particularly affected by extreme heat since the 1980s ..., experiencing a larger increase in days over 95°F, as would be expected given the greater warming in that region relative to the eastern US. Several major heatwaves have affected the US since 2018, including a record shattering event in the Pacific Northwest in 2021."

Are the occurrences of 95°F days changing? In a climate as varied as that of CONUS, threshold statistics can be misleading. A region with many stations which ~~that~~ have near 95°F TMax average temperatures in the summer might see large swings in the metric when only small changes in average temperature occur. Elsewhere with stations that either rarely or virtually always achieve 95°F TMax temperatures, a small change will not impact the results much at all. In the past 126 years, the average CONUS station experienced 129 days exceeding 95°F per 6-yr period, but the regional values range from 278 in the Southern Plains to 9 in the Northeast. Thus, one needs to view such threshold analyses with caution.

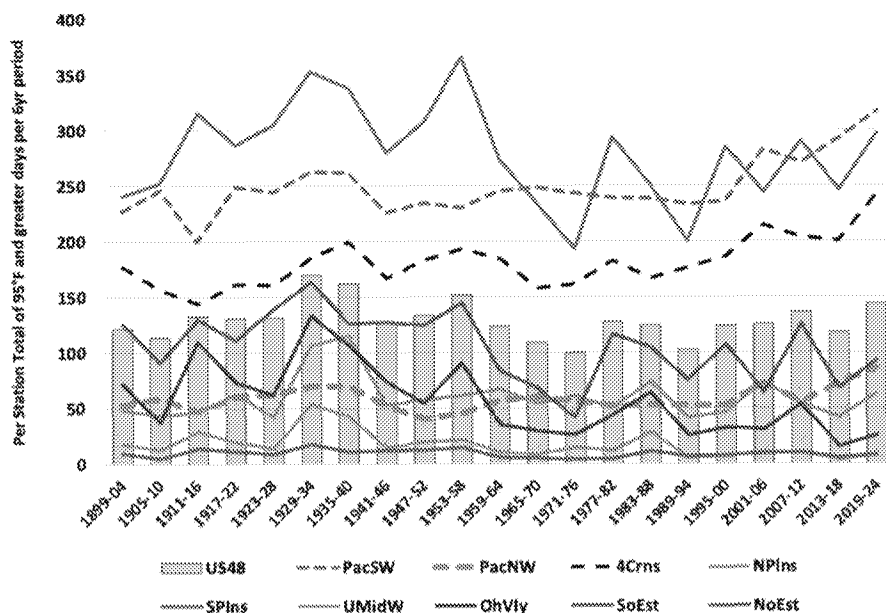


Figure 8.124.3. Total number of days $\geq 95^{\circ}\text{F}$ in 6-yr periods, US 48 (bars) and regions (lines).

In Fig. 8.12 4.3 we see that only three of the nine regions, all in the West, have experienced upward trends in the number of 95°F or hotter days (dashed lines). The CONUS as a whole has not and the other six regions have experienced declines.

The Pacific NW heatwave of 2021 is referenced as supportive information for of the NCA5 claim, an event we examined more closely in Section 6.4. The evidence indicates it was a “black swan” event, i.e., a single, unprecedented event in the existing record, not part of a suggesting it is not indicative of a pattern of increasing extreme heat. For example, the 5-day average tropospheric grid-point temperature anomaly over the Pacific NW during that event was $+10.8^{\circ}\text{C}$, the most extreme NH grid point summer anomaly in the 46 years from over 4 million grids. In contrast, the global anomaly during that time was virtually zero ($+0.03^{\circ}\text{C}$, Mass et al. 2024).

The heading “The Risk of Temperature Extremes is Changing” suggests positive trends are now being observed in threshold temperatures on a widespread basis, but that is not evidenced in the combined CONUS results of the figures above.

8.34.3 Heatwaves

Heatwaves (consecutive days that exceed an extreme threshold) have a greater societal impact than Of more impact than a single daily record. We measure is the phenomena of heatwaves, or consecutive days which exceed an extreme threshold. For this study, the metric will be the number of “Heatwave Days” here defined as the sum count of all days in May-Sep each year which that exceed

the 90th percentile and that occur lie within consecutive periods a run of at least six consecutive days in length. This is equivalent to the method used in NCA5 except that the reference period here is the entire record 1899-2024 while NCA5 limited truncated the reference period to 1961-1990, a cool episode time. By selecting 1961-1990, the that truncation occurrence of boosts positive results (days exceeding the 90th percentile) will be enhanced in periods warmer than the reference base period, especially if starting in 1960 and moving to the present (see *Urban Influences* below).

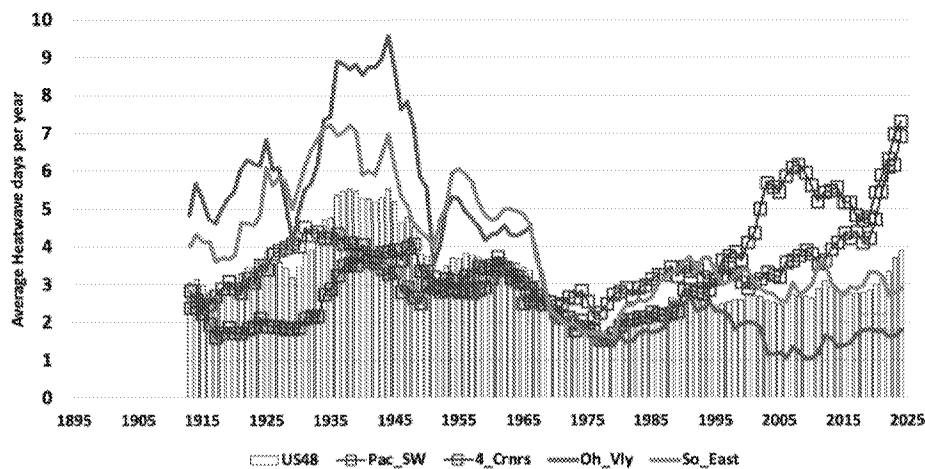


Figure 8.13 4.4 15-year trailing average of number of heatwave days per year per station in the CONUS (bars) and four regions: Pac_SW (purple squares, CA, NV), 4_Crnrs (red squares, AZ, NM, UT, CO), Oh_Vly (blue, MO, IL, KY, TN, IN, OH, WV) and So_East (green, MS, AL, GA, FL, SC, NC, VA).

Figure 8.13 4.4 indicates again the excessive heat of the first half of the 20th century, primarily in the eastern two-thirds of the nation, as seen in the regional values for the Ohio Valley and the Southeast as examples. The West has seen a recent increase of heatwave days and the two regions with the highest number are shown, the Pacific Southwest and the Four Corners (NCA5). This indicates that the background warm season circulation favored heatwaves in the eastern portions of the country in the first half of the 20th century, but in the 21st century the patterns have favored heatwaves in the West. For CONUS as a whole, heatwaves are no more common today than they were a century ago.

Of interest here is the regional variation of this metric. The four northern regions (Pacific NW, Northern Plains, Upper Midwest, and Northeast) on average experience 15 to 27 heatwave days per 15-year period. In contrast, the five southern regions (Pacific Southwest, 4-Corners, Southern Plains, Ohio Valley and Southeast) see 37 to 54 such days, essentially twice as many. This suggests the summer circulation pattern is more prone to stationary events in the southern regions while transient systems in the northern regions are more common and thus cut short these potentially longer events.

Urban influences

The NCA5 directs readers to the website [HYPERLINK "https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves"] (USGCRP 2023) to view the number of urban heatwaves by decade from the 1960s. The figure reveals shows a monotonic increase in each decade from 2 occurrences per year in the 1960s to 6 in the 2020s. The definition of a heatwave is an unusual but practical measure from aof human discomfort perspective – a period of at least 2 consecutive days when the minimum apparent minimum temperature (combination of temperature and humidity) exceeds the 85th percentile. Note too, the dataset is limited to the 50 largest U.S. cities in the US.

These increasing values since 1960 presented in USGCRP (2023) are entirely reasonable, but are unrelated to GHG emissions for at least two reasons unrelated to GHG emissions. Urbanization in these cities is a major factor in the rise of TMin relative to co-located TMax and relative to TMin at rural stations. Also, the 1960s was the coldest decade and 1970s the second coldest decade since the 1910's, so this starting date preconditions the time series to show increases. This does not dismiss the real rise in nighttime temperatures in major U.S. cities and the societal impacts associated with these changes. However, we note for a variety of reasons, that summer TMax (especially in rural areas) serves as better response variable for detecting potential changes in heatwaves influenced by changes in the background climate due, for example, to increasing GHGs (Christy et al. 2009). For the CONUS as a whole, the evidence in this section suggests GHG emissions have had little to no effect on heatwaves in the CONUS.

8.34.4 Extremes in daily precipitation.

Because precipitation involves a discrete phase change (water vapor to liquid), it is Due to its stochastic and episodic in character and therefore, precipitation requires careful statistical treatment to understand variability over long time periods (see 8.1 Introduction). The US National Climate Assessments (NCA4, NCA5) have highlighted an increase in the occurrence of the heaviest precipitation events (defined in different ways) primarily in the eastern half of the CONUS, especially the Northeast, when starting in either 1901 or 1958. Interestingly, the regional variations indicate that the largest increases in extreme events are in the Northeast and least the smallest in the West, which is a trend counter to the changes in temperature extremes shown above.

Commented [A13]: Stochasticity and LTP are really different things, but we somehow conflate them in this sentence. Or am I missing something?

Commented [A14R13]: By removing the 'therefore' I think we are now not conflating them.

McKittrick and Christy (2019) examined long-term and consistent station observations of daily precipitation to test some of these NCA claims for the Southeast and West Coast. In neither case Wwhen the time series were extended back in time (as far as 1872 in some cases) or when starting later (1978), there were no were the trends significant trends for either region. For this report we updated these findings with similarly constructed observations from 29 stations on the Pacific Coast (1893ff from San Diego CA to Blaine WA, see Figure 8.14), 24 stations in the humid Southeast (1872ff from Austin TX to Washington DC, see Figure 8.15), and 21 stations in the Northeast (1888ff from Buffalo NY to Gardiner ME, see Figure 8.16). The results were as follows:

Pacific region:

- Average precipitation trend is significant (downwards) in Astoria, insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant in Big Sur, insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant in Aberdeen and Big Sur and negative and significant in Newport (insignificant elsewhere).
- Averaged over all stations in the region none of these three trend parameters is statistically significant.

Southeast region:

- ~~The trend in average precipitation is positive and significant in Mobile and Quitman, insignificant elsewhere.~~
- ~~The trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant in Mobile, insignificant elsewhere.~~
- ~~The trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant in Vicksburg and Norfolk, insignificant elsewhere.~~
- ~~Averaged over all stations in the region none of these three trend parameters is statistically significant~~

Northeast region:

- ~~The trend in average precipitation is positive and significant in 9 of 21 locations and in the region averaged overall.~~
- ~~The trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant in Portland, Albany and Buffalo, insignificant elsewhere.~~
- ~~The trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant in Portland and Gardiner, insignificant elsewhere.~~
- ~~Averaged over all stations in the region the trend parameters for variance and maximum precipitation are not statistically significant.~~

~~In the Pacific region, over the whole sample, the trend in average precipitation trends downward, being significant only is negative and significant in Astoria, and insignificant elsewhere. The trend in rainfall variance increases, is positive and significant only in Big Sur, and insignificant elsewhere. The trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant in Aberdeen and Big Sur and negative and significant in Newport and insignificant elsewhere. Averaged over all stations in the region none of these three trend parameters is statistically significant.~~

~~In the Southeast region over the whole sample the trend in average precipitation is positive and significant only in Mobile and Quitman, the trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant only in Mobile and the trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant only in Vicksburg and Norfolk. Averaged over all stations in the region none of these three trend parameters is statistically significant.~~

~~The Northeast region exhibits a pattern of increasing average rainfall. The trend in average precipitation is positive and significant in 9 of 21 locations and in the region averaged overall. The trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant only in Portland, Albany and Buffalo and insignificant elsewhere and not in the regional average. The trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant only in Portland ME and Gardiner ME and insignificant elsewhere and not in the regional average.]~~

Commented [A15]: Suggest a simple table summarizing these trends.

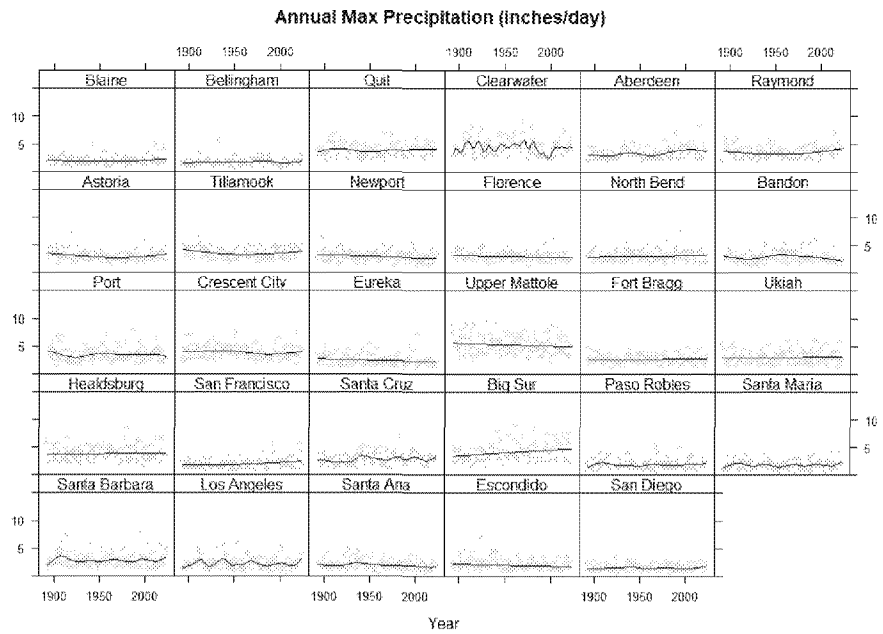


Figure 8.11 Annual maximum precipitation for 29 Pacific stations 1893 to present

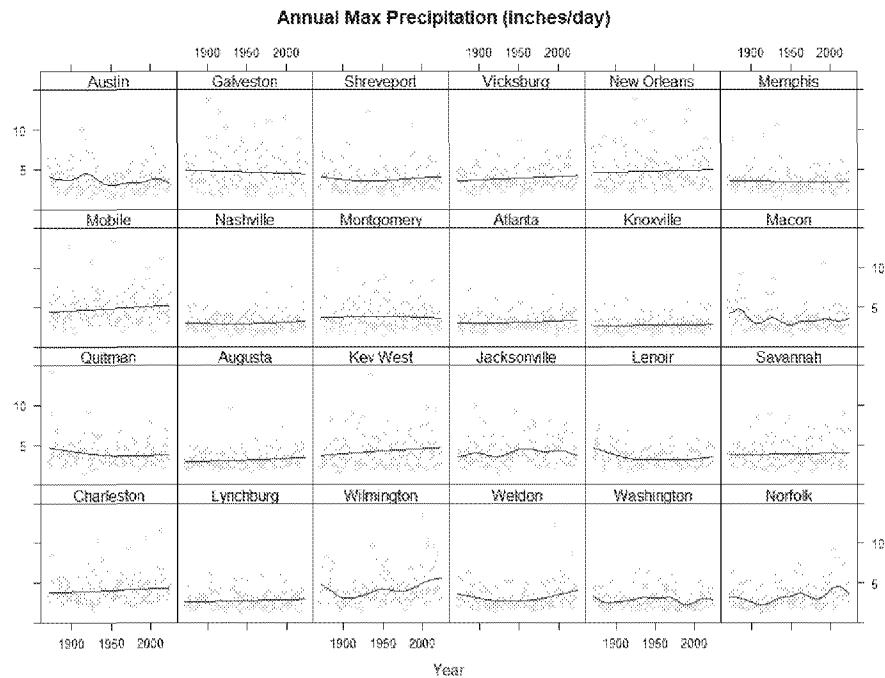


Figure 8.12 Annual maximum precipitation for 24 Southeast stations 1872 to present

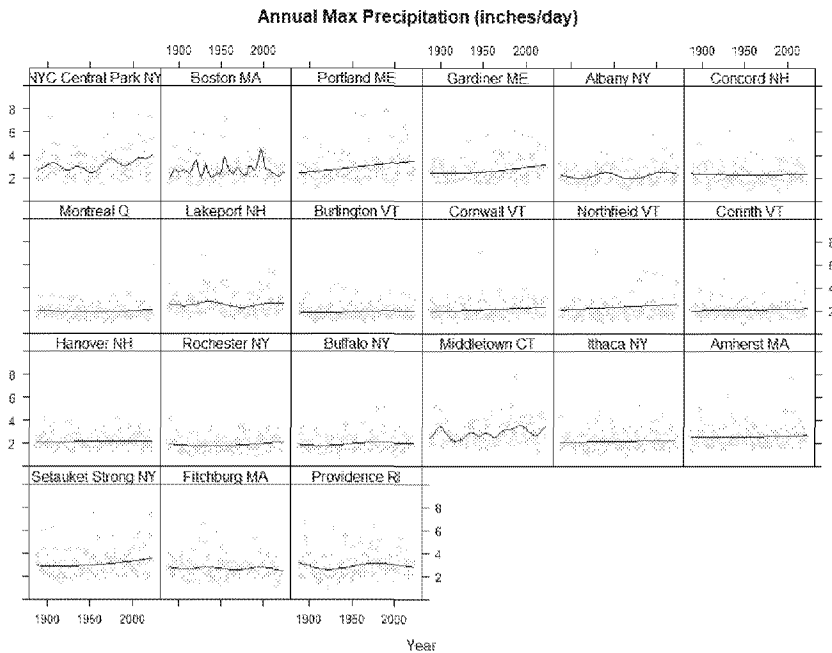


Figure 8.13 Annual maximum precipitation for 21 Northeast stations 1888 to present

Pacific Coast heavy rainfall events

The Pacific Coast receives considerable amounts of precipitation from Atmospheric River (AR) events which often last more than a day or two (e.g., Gershunov et al. 2017, Pan et al. 2024). The worst known such event in recent history was the ArkStorm that occurred between December 1861 and January 1862, which dumped nearly 10 feet of rain in parts of California and submerged the entire Central Valley for weeks under as much as 15 feet of water (Brewer 1930, Null and Hulbert 2007). Paleoclimate research has found six megastorms more severe than 1861–1862 in California during the last 1800 years, occurring at intervals of 300 years or so (Porter et al. 2011).

SIDEBAR: Perils of short data records

San Francisco provides a good case study of the limitation of using short historical samples to characterize natural variability of extreme events. Suppose we use a 130-year sample of daily San Francisco precipitation from 1895 to 2024 and we look for 3-day, 5-day, 14-day and 30-day rainfall records. The results are as shown in Table 8.12.

Event	Record (inches)	Year
3-day	6.94	2023
5-day	8.55	2023
14-day	12.62	2023

30-day 18.93 1998
Table 8.12: Extreme rainfall records, San Francisco, 1895-2024.

The records all cluster in the more recent data. 2023 appears to be an exceptional year and since it is near the end of the sample it would ~~might~~ point to the possibility ~~suggest~~ that the climate has shifted into a potentially more hazardous state, ~~perhaps as a result of human influences.~~

But the picture is very different if we use a sample that begins ~~45~~ years earlier, in 1850. If we extend the record back to 1850 the picture changes. Table 8.23 shows that the record-setting events ~~then~~ all happened in the 1860s. Furthermore 2023 is now not even in 2nd place but falls to 3rd or 4th. Also, comparing the records of the two charts the extreme precipitation events in 1862 and 1867 involved considerably more rainfall than the 1998 and 2023 events, with 14- and 30-day totals about 50 percent higher.

Commented [A16]: Check this

Event	Record (inches)	Year	Rank of 130-yr extreme
3-day	8.85	1867	3
5-day	9.80	1867	3
14-day	19.05	1862	4
30-day	28.25	1862	2

Table 8.23: Extreme rainfall records, San Francisco, 1850-2024.

~~The~~ The characterization of the range of natural variability is made even more remarkable when paleoclimate evidence is examined. Porter et al. (2011) discovered that in the past 1,800 years at least six megastorms were more intense than the devastating 1861-62 ArkStorm ~~that~~ struck the region. Thus, ~~Evidently~~ such extreme events have impacted the region about every 300 years, though not since 1895.

This example illustrates the limitations of using relatively short climate periods (~130 years) to assess the character and range of natural variability in general and of extreme events in particular. Accurate representation of the full range of natural variability is necessary for any attribution analyses (see 6.4). Infrastructure planners, emergency management institutions and attribution scientists would understand the significant mischaracterization of the magnitude of a future extreme if based only on the last 130 years. In this case, a single time-sample of 130 years provides an underestimation of the extreme value by up to 50% determined when adding only 45 more years of observations. Compared to millennial-scale paleoclimate evidence, an even greater underestimation would occur. ~~An important lesson is that the climate can deliver great surprises on its own, even without human influences.~~

We examine occurrences of 5-day deluges as follows. In a 130-year span there are 26 5-year intervals. At each location we computed the 5-day precipitation totals throughout the year and selected the 26 highest values. A single year may have more than one of the 26 heaviest. Each of those can be thought of as 1-in-5yr events. If there are no trends in precipitation then the total number of these events across all stations should be evenly spread out on an annual basis ~~over the years~~. In Fig. 8.14.4.5 we show the distribution in time of these events. The deluges associated with the massive 1997-98 El Niño event are readily apparent. While erratic, as is typical of these types of precipitation metrics, there is no indication of a tendency to become more frequent over time.

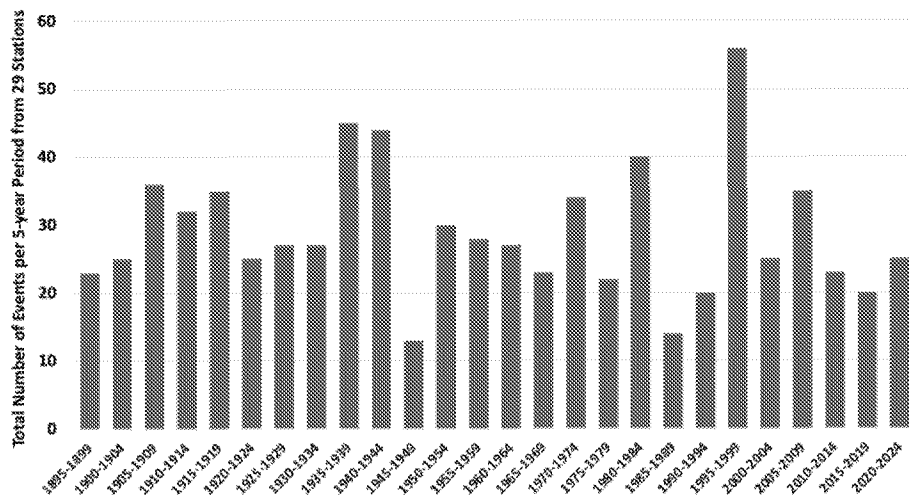


Figure 8.144.5 The time distribution by 5-year periods of the 26-heaviest occurrences for each station (i.e., nominal 1-in-5 year event).

Commented [A17]: Suggest this and the following three figures be combined into one with multiple panels.

Southeast heavy rainfall events

The temporal pattern of 5-day totals of the 1-in-5yr heavy events in the humid Southeast (Figure 8.154.6) is generally unremarkable, though a cluster of higher values appears in 1995 to 2019. The increase in those years is due largely to the 4 northeastern-most stations of Wilmington NC, Weldon NC, Washington DC, and Norfolk VA. This confirms the pattern indicated in NCA4 and NCA5 of a tendency for an increasing frequency of heavy events, due to a temporal clustering of tropical storms from eastern NC to Maine discussed below. Otherwise, the remaining 20 stations show an unremarkable temporal distribution of heavy events.

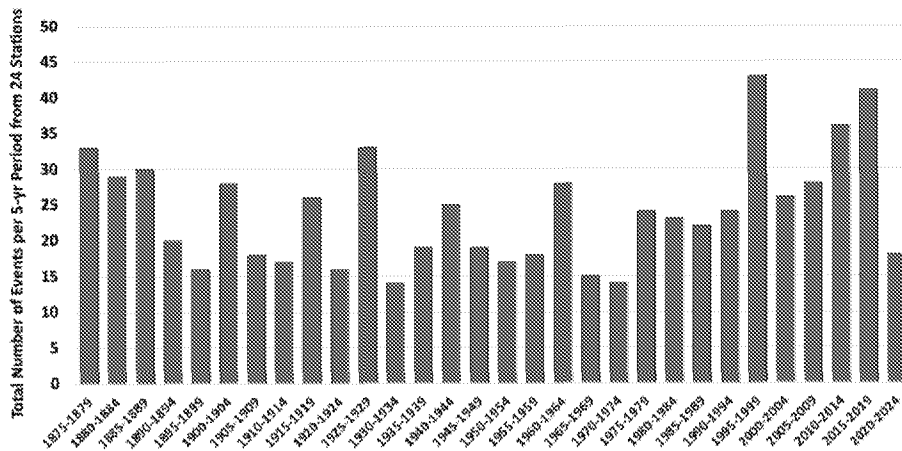


Figure 8.154.6. As above but for the 30 heaviest 1-in-5yr events for 24 stations in the humid Southeast from Austin TX to Washington DC in 5-year bins for 1875-2024.

Northwest heavy rainfall events

Fig. 8.164.7 shows the 27 (1-in-5yr) heaviest 3-day events for the last 135 years in 21 stations in the Northeast (including Montreal Canada). We use 3-day totals here as this produced the largest variations in time. In this region, 72% of the events occur during June to October and are dominated by tropical incursions of hurricanes, tropical storms or tropical storms that transition to extratropical systems. According to NCA4 and NCA5 this region experienced the largest increases in extreme events, so it shall be examined more closely.

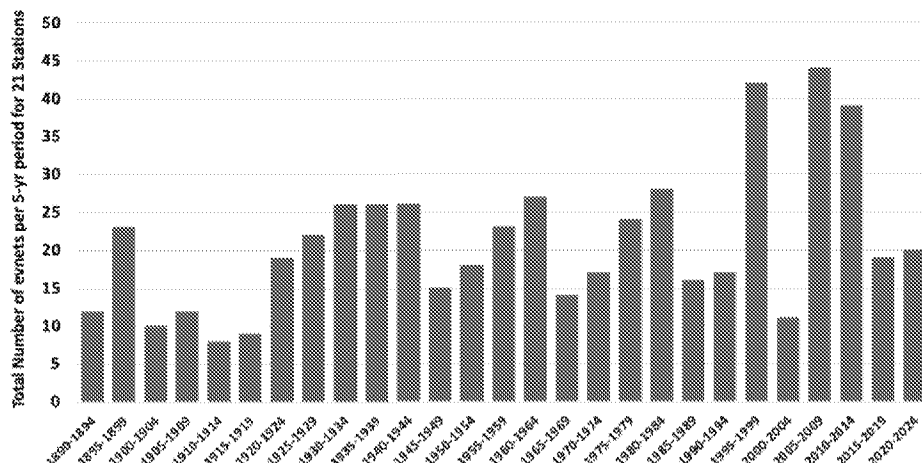


Figure 8.164.7. Time distribution of the heaviest 27 (1-in-5yr) heaviest 3-day precipitation events for 21 stations from NY to ME, including Montreal.

Howarth et al. (2019) report differences in the Northeast between two 18-year periods: 1979-96 and 1997-2014 (a similar region as in Fig. 8.16 that includes PA and NJ) of various precipitation extremes. One metric which indicated a dramatic increase (317%) was found for 24-hr events > 6 inches. This high increase is due to the very small numbers of such events of which there were only 6 in the first period and 25 in the second as reported for 58 stations. This high percentage increase is due to the very small numbers of the events; only 6 in the first period and 25 in the second. Most of the stations did not record such an event suggesting these erratic, episodic events over brief, 18-yr periods, need scrutiny by additional statistical methods.

Using the information in Fig. 8.16 4.7, over the same years as Howarth et al. we find a 51% increase in the frequency of heavy events between the two periods. One can see in Fig. 8.16 that it was unfortunate that Howarth et al. ended in 2014 prior to a return to the long-term average of such events.

A feature of Howarth et al. is the use of single day totals which is questionable because extreme events are often spread across the time of observation boundary. Thus stations measuring at 0700 LT versus those at Midnight will have differing results for a particular event which would then have major impacts on counting these events. We use the 3-day totals in Fig. 8.16 4.7 to be sure to capture the extent of these extreme downpours. In any case, we can confirm that the period 1997 to 2014 experienced a cluster of heavier events as Howarth et al. have documented.

Howarth's most remarkable claim (317% increase in 6" days) is potentially misleading because it is a threshold statistic (see Section 8.34.2 above) and a ratio of small numbers over a short period. The result is not representative of *relative* extreme events for the whole region since the majority of stations never experienced a 6" total. Fig. 8.16 above determines the same number of events for each station (27 heaviest events) whose heaviest values ranged from 4.4" to 12.5" and their 27th heaviest values ranged from 3.3" to 5.0". This analysis thus allows each station to be equally represented. In

other words, if there is a region-wide increase in heavy events, it should be seen in the sum of all stations. Note too that the period of record here is 135 years vs. 36 years of Howarth et al. Except for three 5-year periods between 1995 and 2014 there is nothing statistically remarkable about the results in Fig. 8.164.7.

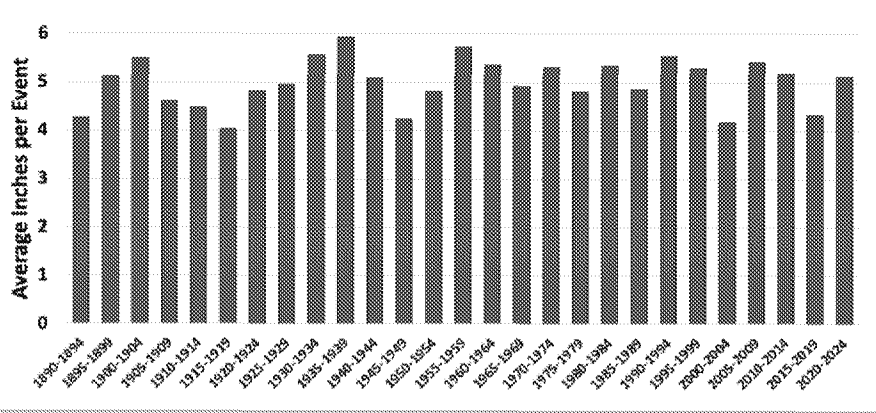


Figure 8.174.8. Average amount of precipitation falling in the 1-in-5yr events for the NE stations.

An interesting aspect of Northeast precipitation is that there has been no change in the amount of precipitation per heaviest event, as shown in Fig. 8.174.8. The trend is only +0.02"/decade. The highest amount, 1935-39, includes the Great New England Hurricane of 1938, one of the rare major (Category 3 or higher) hurricanes to strike the region. The results in Figs. 8.4.615 and 8.16.4.7 suggest that though there was an uptick in the number of events during the period 1995 to 2014, the events, individually, are not becoming more intense.

Jong et al. (2024) document the increase of tropical influences on precipitation events in the Northeast since 1959 and concluded, "The autumn extreme precipitation trend over the Northeast US is primarily attributed to tropical cyclone-related events since the 1990s." The question then becomes, was the temporal clustering of tropical systems in 1997-2014 which affected the Northeast a response to increasing GHGs? Jong et al. examined CMIP-6 model output which suggests that there will be fewer such systems in the 21st century but that the intensity of the rainfall events might increase. This conjecture is not seen in Fig. 8.17 where the amount per event has remained steady over the 135-year period.

For substantial urban areas there is some evidence to indicate the heaviest rainfall events may be redistributed due to the impact urban infrastructure has on the local weather (e.g., Pielke Sr. et al. 2011, Zhang et al. 2018, Yang et al. 2024). Yang et al. state, "Cities that experience compact development tend to witness larger increases in extreme rainfall frequency over downtown than their rural surroundings, while the anomalies in extreme rainfall frequency diminish for cities with

dispersed development." While this is an important insight to consider, the effect on the specific stations used in this analysis is unknown, or at least not detectable in Fig. 8.17.

In summary, the evidence from the historical record of extreme precipitation events in the CONUS is generally not consistent from region to region so that inferences regarding trends and their projections are wrought with significant uncertainty. In most regions and perhaps all, it is our opinion that the very nature of the erratic and episodic character of extreme precipitation events renders the discovery of statistically significant changes, including a relationship to CO₂ concentrations, a result yet to be achieved (McKittrick and Christy 2019).

8.4510 Summary

To be inserted

Based on the content provided in the document, here are the five most important takeaways:

- Limited Detection of Anthropogenic Signals: The IPCC has asserted high confidence in detecting an anthropogenic signal in only 4 out of 34 weather impact categories, and medium confidence in 4 more. For the remaining 26 categories, no anthropogenic signal is claimed to be detected.
- Slow Emergence of Trends: Even under the most extreme forcing scenario (RCP8.5), the IPCC expects very few anthropogenic trends to emerge within this century for most weather impacts.
- Natural Variability Dominance: Natural variability continues to dominate patterns of extreme weather systems. Simple assertions of trend detection are often complicated by regional heterogeneity and trend reversals over time.
- RCP8.5 Scenario Implausibility: The document notes that the RCP8.5 scenario is described as an implausible high-end storyline, not a "base case" or "business-as-usual" projection.
- Conflicting Messages on Attribution: The document mentions that AR6 (IPCC Sixth Assessment Report) offers conflicting messages about the attribution of extreme weather to anthropogenic causes, highlighting the complexity and uncertainty in this area of climate science.

These takeaways emphasize the nuanced and complex nature of attributing extreme weather events to climate change, and the importance of considering natural variability and uncertainty in climate projections.

Commented [A18]: Out of curiosity (and perhaps utility), I fed the entire document (absent this section) into Anthropic's Claude-3.5-sonnet LLM and asked it what are the five most important takeaways. This is what it produced. I'd judge it not a bad start that will need some human improvement, which I'll undertake on the next iteration.

References

Brewer, W., *Up and Down California in 1860–1864 The Journal of William H. Brewer* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1930).

Christy, J.R. W. Norris and R.T. McNider, 2009. Surface temperature variations in East Africa and possible causes. *J. Climate*, 22, 3342–3356. DOI: 10.1175/2008JCLI2726.1.

Cohn, Timothy A., Lins, Harry F. (2005). Nature's style: naturally trendy. *Geophys. Res. Lett.* 32. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1029/2005GL024476"].

Gershunov, A. and K. Guirguis, 2012. California heat waves in the present and future. *Geophys. Res. Lett.* [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1029/2012GL052979"]

Gershunov, A., Shulgina, T., Ralph, F. M., Lavers, D. A. & Rutz, J. J. Assessing the climate-scale variability of atmospheric rivers affecting western North America. *Geophys. Res. Lett.* **44**, 7900–7908 (2017).

Howarth, M.E., C.D. Thorncroft and L.F. Bosart, 2019, Changes in extreme precipitation in the Northeast United States: 1979-2014. *J. Hydromet.* **20**, 673-689. DOI: 10.1175/JHM-D-18-0155.1

Hurst, H. E. (1951), Long term storage capacities of reservoirs, *Trans. Am. Soc. Civ. Eng.*, **116**, 776–808.

Jong, B.-T., Murakami, H., Delworth, T. L., & Cooke, W. F. (2024). Contributions of tropical cyclones and atmospheric rivers to extreme precipitation trends over the Northeast US. *Earth's Future*, **12**, e2023EF004370. <https://doi.org/10.1029/2023EF004370>

Karl, T.R., C.N. Williams, Jr., F.T. Quinlan, and T.A. Boden, 1990: United States Historical Climatology Network (HCN) Serial Temperature and Precipitation Data, Environmental Science Division, Publication No. 3404, Carbon Dioxide Information and Analysis Center, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Oak Ridge, TN, 389 pp.

Markonis, Yannis, Koutsoyiannis, Demetris (2016). Scale-dependence of persistence in precipitation records. *Nat. Clim. Change* **6**, 399–401.

Mass, C., D. Owens, J. Christy, and R. Conrick, **2024**: The Pacific Northwest heat wave of 25-30 June 2021: Synoptic/Mesoscale conditions and climate perspective. *Weather and Forecasting*, **39**. DOI: 10.1175/WAF-D-23-0154.1.

McKittrick, R. and J.R. Christy, **2019**: Assessing changes in US regional precipitation on multiple time scales. *J. Hydro.* **578**, (2019), DOI.ORG/10.1016/j.jhydrol.2019.124074

Overland, J. E., 2021: Causes of the record-breaking Pacific Northwest heatwave, late June 2021. *Atmosphere*, **12**, 1434, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3390/atmos12111434>" \t "_blank"].

NCA4, Climate Science Special Report: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume I, 2017. Wuebbles, D.J., D.W. Fahey and K.A. Hibbard.eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program. Washington DC, USA. doi: 10.7930/J0J964J6. [HYPERLINK "<https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/19486>"]

NCA5, Fifth National Climate Assessment. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH1>"].

Null, J. and J. Hulbert, "California Washed Away: The Great Flood of 1862," *Weatherwise* **60**, no. 1 (2007): 26–30, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3200/wewi.60.1.26-30>"].

Pan, M., M. Lu and U. Lall, 2024: Diversity of cross-Pacific atmospheric river main routes. *Nature Com. Earth & Envi.* **5**, 378. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01552-y>"]

Philip, S. Y., Kew, S. F., van Oldenborgh, G. J., Anslow, F. S., Seneviratne, S. I., Vautard, R., Coumou, D., Ebi, K. L., Arrighi, J., Singh, R., van Aalst, M., Pereira Marghidan, C., Wehner, M., Yang, W., Li, S., Schumacher, D. L., Hauser, M., Bonnet, R., Luu, L. N., Lehner, F., Gillett, N., Tradosky, J. S., Vecchi, G. A., Rodell, C., Stull, R. B., Howard, R., and Otto, F. E. L.: Rapid attribution analysis of the extraordinary heat wave on the Pacific coast of the US and Canada in June 2021, *Earth Syst. Dynam.*, **13**, 1689–1713, <https://doi.org/10.5194/esd-13-1689-2022>, 2022.

Porter, K. et al., *Overview of the Arkstorm Scenario* (Reston, VA: Dept. of the Interior. U.S. Geological Survey, 2011).

Pielke, R. A. et al. Land use/land cover changes and climate: Modeling analysis and observational evidence. *Wiley Interdiscip. Rev. Clim. Chang.* **2**, 828–850 (2011).

Quinlan, F. T., T. R. Karl, and C. N. Williams Jr. (1987), United States Historical Climatology Network (USHCN) serial temperature and precipitation data, NDP-019, Carbon Dioxide Inf. Anal. Cent., Oak Ridge Natl. Lab., U.S. Dep. of Energy, Oak Ridge, Tenn.

USGCRP, 2023: USGCRP Indicators Platform: Heat Waves. U.S. Global Change Research Program. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves>" \t "_blank"]

White, R.H., Anderson, S., Booth, J.F. *et al.* The unprecedented Pacific Northwest heatwave of June 2021. *Nat Commun* **14**, 727 (2023). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-023-36289-3>"]

Weinkle, Jessica, Ryan Maue and Roger Pielke Jr. (2012) Historical Global Tropical Cyclone Landfalls *Journal of Climate* 25(13) 4729–4735 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/JCLI-D-11-00719.1>" \t "_blank"]

Tu, Shifei, Zhenzhen Hu, Mei Liang, Wen Zhou, Johnny Chan and Jianjun Xu (2024) Decreasing trend in destructive potential of tropical cyclones in the South Indian Ocean since the mid-1990s. *Communications Earth and Environment* 5:543 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01683-2>"]

Yang, L., Yang, Y., Shen, Y. *et al.* Urban development pattern's influence on extreme rainfall occurrences. *Nat Commun* **15**, 3997 (2024). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-48533-5>"].

Zhang, W., Villarini, G., Vecchi, G. A. & Smith, J. A. Urbanization exacerbated the rainfall and flooding caused by hurricane Harvey in Houston. *Nature* **563**, 384–388 (2018).

Appendix: Review of IPCC and NCA Findings on Extreme Weather

The sources we review will be denoted as follows:

SREX: The IPCC *Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation* (2012)

AR5: The IPCC *Fifth Assessment Report Working Group 1* (2013).

AR6: The IPCC *Sixth Assessment Report Working Group 1* (2021).

NCA17: The *US Climate Science Special Report of the Fourth National Climate Assessment* (2017) Volume I Chapter 6.

8A.1 Overview: IPCC Assessment of signal emergence in extreme weather types (AR6 WG1 Table 12.12)

Table 8A.1 reproduces the findings of AR6 Table 12.12 which indicates, for 34 major weather event and impact types, whether a signal of anthropogenic forcing has been detected in the historical record (column 1), whether such a signal is likely to emerge by 2050 under the extreme RCP8.5 scenario (column 2) and whether it is likely to emerge by 2100 under RCP8.5 forcing (column 3). It should be borne in mind that the latter two columns suffer from the deficiencies of GCMs discussed in Chapter XX. And as we discussed in Ch X on attribution, AR6 offers three conflicting messages within the AR6 regarding about attribution of extreme weather. Nevertheless, we provide This Table is provided here for reference.

Several patterns stand out. First, detection of an anthropogenic signal is asserted with high confidence in only four out of the 34 weather impact categories an anthropogenic signal is asserted with high confidence in only four, and with medium confidence in a further four. For the rest The IPCC does not NOT claim to have detected an anthropogenic signal in the remaining 26 categories drivers. Of the four high confidence assertions, two are for changes in average temperatures (air and ocean), which hence are not measures of extreme weather. Also two Further, two of the four medium confidence assertions are related to ocean chemistry and thus are likewise also not related to extreme weather. The IPCC does not NOT assert a detectable human influence on many non-temperature weather features such as wind, precipitation, flooding, and drought, etc.

Second, as shown in, columns 2 and 3 show that the IPCC expects very few such anthropogenic trends signals to emerge within this century, even under the most extreme forcing scenario. As we discuss in Section 4.2 the RCP8.5 scenario is an implausible high-end storyline, it is not a "base case" or "business-as-usual" projection. Yet even still Even so, most weather impacts are not expected to exhibit show an anthropogenic signal this century. As will be clear from the underlying report text, nNatural variability dominates patterns of extreme weather systems and simplistic assertions of trend detection are frequently undermined by regional heterogeneity and trends reversals over time.

Climate Impact Driver Type	Climate Impact Driver Category	Already Emerged in the Historical Record?	Emerging by 2050 in Most Extreme CO ₂ Emissions Scenario?	Emerging by 2100 in Most Extreme CO ₂ Emissions Scenario?
Heat & Cold	Average air temperature	YES in most regions	YES	YES
	More heat extremes	YES in most regions	YES in land regions	YES
	Fewer cold extremes	YES in a few regions	YES in many regions	YES
	Less frost	NO	NO	NO

Wet & Dry	Average precip. (Increase or Decrease)	NO	YES (incr) YES (decr)	YES (incr) YES (decr)
	River flooding	NO	NO	NO
	Heavy precip. & pluvial flood	NO	NO	YES in a few regions
	Landslide	NO	NO	NO
	Aridity	NO	NO	NO
	Hydrologic Drought	NO	NO	NO
	Agricultural & ecological drought	NO	NO	NO
Wind	Fire weather	NO	NO	NO
	Average wind speed	NO	NO	NO
	Severe wind storm	NO	NO	NO
	Tropical cyclone	NO	NO	NO
Snow and Ice	Sand and dust storm	NO	NO	NO
	Snow, glacier & ice sheet	NO	YES in a few regions	YES Arctic snow
	Permafrost	YES	YES	YES
	Lake & river ice	NO	YES	YES
	Arctic sea ice	YES	YES	YES
	Antarctic sea ice	NO	YES	YES
	Heavy snowfall and ice storm	NO	NO	NO
	Hail	NO	NO	NO
	Snow avalanche	NO	NO	NO
Coastal	Relative sea level	NO	YES	YES
	Coastal flood	NO	NO	NO
	Coastal erosion	NO	NO	NO
Open Ocean	Average ocean temperature	YES	YES	YES
	Marine heat wave	NO	NO	NO
	Ocean acidity	NO	YES	YES
	Ocean salinity	YES	YES	YES
	Dissolved oxygen	YES (Pacific & S. Ocean)	YES	YES
Other	Air pollution weather	NO	NO	NO

8 Evidence on trends and attributable changes in extreme weather

8.1 Review of prior expert assessments

It has become routine in popular discussions and media representation of climate change to assert that extreme weather is getting worse globally due to greenhouse gases. Yet expert assessments have not typically concluded this, and instead have emphasized the difficulty of identifying trends or establishing a causal connection with anthropogenic forcing. In this chapter we will start by reviewing the information in previous IPCC and NCA assessments, then we will explore long term patterns in US temperature and precipitation data.

The sources we review will be denoted as follows:

- SREX:** The IPCC *Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation* (2012)
- AR5:** The IPCC *Fifth Assessment Report Working Group 1* (2013).
- AR6:** The IPCC *Sixth Assessment Report Working Group 1* (2021).
- NCA17:** The *US Climate Science Special Report of the Fourth National Climate Assessment* (2017) Volume I Chapter 6.

8.1.1 Overview: IPCC Assessment of signal emergence in extreme weather types (AR6 WG1 Table 12.12)

Table 8.1 reproduces the findings of AR6 Table 12.12 which indicates, for 34 major weather event and impact types, whether a signal of anthropogenic forcing has been detected in the historical record (column 1), whether such a signal is likely to emerge by 2050 under the extreme RCP8.5 scenario (column 2) and whether it is likely to emerge by 2100 under RCP8.5 forcing (column 3). Several patterns stand out.

First, out of the 34 weather impact categories an anthropogenic signal is asserted with *high confidence* in only four, and with *medium confidence* in a further four. For the rest the IPCC does not claim to have detected anthropogenic drivers. Of the four *high confidence* assertions, two are for changes in average temperatures (air and ocean) hence are not measures of extreme weather. Also two of the four *medium confidence* assertions are related to ocean chemistry and thus are likewise not related to extreme weather. The IPCC does not assert a human influence on many non-temperature weather features such as wind, precipitation, flooding, drought etc.

Second, as shown in columns 2 and 3 the IPCC expects very few such signals to emerge this century *even under the most extreme forcing scenario*. As we discuss in Section 4.2 the RCP8.5 scenario is an implausible high-end storyline, it is not a “base case” or business-as-usual projection. Yet even still most weather impacts are not expected to exhibit an anthropogenic signal this century. As will be clear from the underlying report text, natural variability dominates patterns of extreme weather systems and simplistic assertions of trend detection are frequently undermined by regional heterogeneity and trends reversals over time.

Climate Impact Driver Type	Climate Impact Driver Category	Already Emerged in the Historical Record?	Emerging by 2050 in Most Extreme CO2 Emissions Scenario?	Emerging by 2100 in Most Extreme CO2 Emissions Scenario?
----------------------------	--------------------------------	---	--	--

Heat & Cold	Average air temperature	YES in most regions	YES	YES
	More heat extremes	YES in most regions	YES in land regions	YES
	Fewer cold extremes	YES in a few regions	YES in many regions	YES
	Less frost	NO	NO	NO
Wet & Dry	Average Precip. (Increase or Decrease)	NO	YES (incr) YES (decr)	YES (incr) YES (decr)
	River flooding	NO	NO	NO
	Heavy precip & pluvial flood	NO	NO	YES in a few regions
	Landslide	NO	NO	NO
	Aridity	NO	NO	NO
	Hydrologic Drought	NO	NO	NO
	Agricultural & ecological drought	NO	NO	NO
	Fire weather	NO	NO	NO
Wind	Average wind speed	NO	NO	NO
	Severe wind storm	NO	NO	NO
	Tropical cyclone	NO	NO	NO
	Sand and dust storm	NO	NO	NO
Snow and Ice	Snow, glacier & ice sheet	NO	YES in a few regions	YES Arctic snow
	Permafrost	YES	YES	YES
	Lake & river ice	NO	YES	YES
	Arctic sea ice	YES	YES	YES
	Antarctic sea ice	NO	YES	YES
	Heavy snowfall and ice storm	NO	NO	NO
	Hail	NO	NO	NO
	Snow avalanche	NO	NO	NO
Coastal	Relative sea level	NO	YES	YES
	Coastal flood	NO	NO	NO
	Coastal erosion	NO	NO	NO
Open Ocean	Average ocean temperature	YES	YES	YES
	Marine heat wave	NO	NO	NO
	Ocean acidity	NO	YES	YES
	Ocean salinity	YES	YES	YES
	Dissolved oxygen	YES (Pacific & S. Ocean)	YES	YES
Other	Air pollution weather	NO	NO	NO
	Solar or IR radiation at surface	NO	NO	NO

Table 8.1. IPCC AR6 summary of the probable emergence of an anthropogenic signal above natural climate variability for all global or regional “climate impact drivers” (CIDs) of concern for humans and ecosystems in response to increasing atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations (primarily CO₂). Source: Table adapted from report of Working Group I, Table 12.12). Red = high confidence; yellow = medium confidence; green = no anthropogenic signal detectable above natural variability (50% confidence).

Formatted: Subscript

Taking wind as an example, the IPCC claims that an anthropogenic signal has not emerged in average wind speeds, severe wind storms, tropical cyclones or sand and dust storms, nor is one expected to emerge this century even under an extreme emissions scenario. The same applies to drought and fire weather. This table alone suffices to illustrate the gap between IPCC expert assessment of extreme weather and discussions of extreme weather in the popular press. As we show below the Table reflects longstanding conclusions of the IPCC and other assessment bodies. In the next few sections we will simply present without comment excerpts from past assessment reports.

Notes: in these excerpts bold-face emphasis is added. Italicized emphasis on *confidence* terms is in the original sources. Citations contained in quoted text can be found in the underlying reports but are not reproduced here.

8.1.2 Flooding

SREX (p. 176)

In the United States and Canada during the 20th century and in the early 21st century, **there is no compelling evidence for climate-driven changes in the magnitude or frequency of floods.**

AR5 (p. 214)

AR4 WGI Chapter 3 (Trenberth et al., 2007) did not assess changes in floods but AR4 WGII concluded that **there was not a general global trend in the incidence of floods** (Kundzewicz et al., 2007). SREX went further to suggest that there was low agreement and thus *low confidence* at the global scale regarding changes in the magnitude or frequency of floods or even the sign of changes.

AR5 WGII assesses floods in regional detail accounting for the fact that trends in floods are strongly influenced by changes in river management (see also Section 2.5.2). Although the most evident flood trends appear to be in northern high latitudes, where observed warming trends have been largest, in some regions no evidence of a trend in extreme flooding has been found, for example, over Russia based on daily river discharge (Shiklomanov et al., 2007). Other studies for Europe (Hannaford and Marsh, 2008; Renard et al., 2008; Petrow and Merz, 2009; Stahl et al., 2010) and Asia (Jiang et al., 2008; Delgado et al., 2010) show evidence for upward, downward or no trend in the magnitude and frequency of floods, so that there is currently no clear and widespread evidence for observed changes in flooding except for the earlier springflow in snow-dominated regions (Seneviratne et al., 2012).

In summary, **there continues to be a lack of evidence and thus *low confidence* regarding the sign of trend in the magnitude and/or frequency of floods on a global scale.**

AR6 (Ch 11 p. 1568)

The SREX (Seneviratne et al., 2012) assessed *low confidence* for observed changes in the magnitude or frequency of floods at the global scale. This assessment was confirmed by the AR5 report (Hartmann et al., 2013). The SR15 (Hoegh-Guldberg et al., 2018) found increases in flood frequency and extreme streamflow in some regions, but decreases in other regions. **While the number of studies on flood trends has increased since the AR5 report, and there were also new analyses after the release of SR15 (Berghuijs et al., 2017; Blöschl et al., 2019; Gudmundsson et al., 2019), hydrological literature on observed flood changes is heterogeneous, focusing at regional and sub-regional basin scales, making it difficult to synthesise at the global and sometimes regional scales.**

In summary, the seasonality of floods has changed in cold regions where snowmelt dominates the flow regime in response to warming (*high confidence*). **Confidence about peak flow trends over past decades on the global scale is low, but there are regions experiencing increases**, including parts of Asia, southern South America, the northeast USA, northwestern Europe, and the Amazon, **and regions experiencing decreases**, including parts of the Mediterranean, Australia, Africa, and the southwestern USA.

US NCA17 pp. 240-41:

“The IPCC AR5 did not attribute changes in flooding to anthropogenic influence nor report detectable changes in flooding magnitude, duration, or frequency. Trends in extreme high values of streamflow are mixed across the United States. Analysis of 200 U.S. stream gauges indicates areas of both increasing and decreasing flooding magnitude but does not provide robust evidence that these trends are attributable to human influences...

The complex mix of processes complicates the formal attribution of observed flooding trends to anthropogenic climate change and suggests that additional scientific rigor is needed in flood attribution studies. As noted above, precipitation increases have been found to strongly influence changes in flood statistics. However, in U.S. regions, **no formal attribution of precipitation changes to anthropogenic forcing has been made so far, so indirect attribution of flooding changes is not possible. Hence, no formal attribution of observed flooding changes to anthropogenic forcing has been claimed.**”

8.1.3 Heatwaves

AR5 (p. 212 WG1)

Table 2.13 shows that there has been a *likely* increasing trend in the frequency of heatwaves since the middle of the 20th century in Europe and Australia and across much of Asia where there are sufficient data. However, confidence on a global scale is *medium* owing to lack of studies over Africa and South America but also in part owing to differences in trends depending on how heatwaves are defined (Perkins et al., 2012). Using monthly means as a proxy for heatwaves Coumou et al. (2013) and Hansen et al. (2012) indicate that record-breaking temperatures in recent decades substantially exceed what would be expected by chance but caution is required when making inferences between these studies and those that deal with multi-day events and/ or use more complex definitions for heatwave events. **There is also evidence in some regions that periods prior to the 1950s had more heatwaves (e.g., over the USA, the decade of the 1930s stands out and is also associated with extreme drought conditions** (Peterson et al., 2013) whereas conversely in other regions heatwave trends may have been underestimated owing to poor quality and/or consistency of data (e.g., Della-Marta et al. (2007a) over Western Europe; Kuglitsch et al. (2009, 2010) over the Mediterranean). Recent available studies also suggest that the number of cold spells has reduced significantly since the 1950s (Donat et al., 2013a, 2013c).

In summary, new analyses continue to support the AR4 and SREX conclusions that since about 1950 it is *very likely* that the numbers of cold days and nights have decreased and the numbers of warm days and nights have increased overall on the global scale, that is, for land areas with sufficient data. It is *likely* that such changes have also occurred across most of North America, Europe, Asia and Australia.

NCA17 (pp. 190-191)

Changes in warm extremes are more nuanced than changes in cold extremes. For instance, **the warmest daily temperature of the year increased in some parts of the West over the past century (Figure 6.3), but there were decreases in almost all locations east of the Rocky Mountains. In fact, all eastern regions experienced a net decrease** (Table 6.2), most notably the Midwest (about 2.2°F [1.2°C]) and the Southeast (roughly 1.5°F [0.8°C]). The decreases in the eastern half of [the] Nation, particularly in the Great Plains, are mainly tied to the unprecedented summer heat of the 1930s Dust Bowl era, which was exacerbated by land-surface feedbacks driven by springtime precipitation deficits and land

mismanagement. However, anthropogenic aerosol forcing may also have reduced summer temperatures in the Northeast and Southeast from the early 1950s to the mid-1970s, and agricultural intensification may have suppressed the hottest extremes in the Midwest.

Since the mid-1960s, there has been only a very slight increase in the warmest daily temperature of the year (amidst large interannual variability). **Heat waves (6-day periods with a maximum temperature above the 90th percentile for 1961–1990) increased in frequency until the mid-1930s, became considerably less common through the mid-1960s, and increased in frequency again thereafter (Figure 6.4). As with warm daily temperatures, heat wave magnitude reached a maximum in the 1930s.**

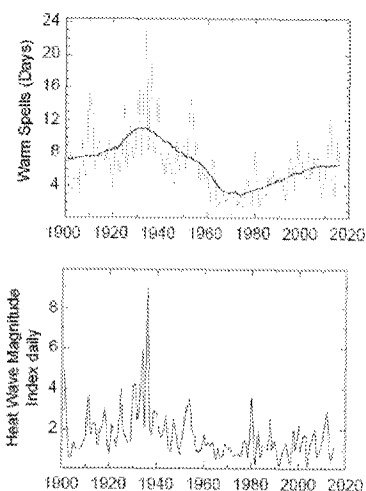


Figure 8.1: US Heat waves since 1900. Source: NCA17 Figure 6.4

AR6 (p. 1550)

In North America (Table 11.19), there is very robust evidence for a *very likely* increase in the intensity and frequency of hot extremes and decrease in the intensity and frequency of cold extremes for the whole continent, though there are substantial spatial and seasonal variations in the trends. Minimum temperatures display warming consistently across the continent, **while there are more contrasting trends in the annual maximum daily temperatures** in parts of the USA (Figure 11.9; Lee et al., 2014; van Oldenborgh et al., 2019; Dunn et al., 2020).

8.1.4 Extreme snowfall events

Note: extreme snowfall events in the US northeast are assessed in relation to winter Extratropical Cyclone (ETC) activity.

AR6 Ch 11. p. 1593

There is *high confidence* that snowfall associated with winter ETCs will decrease in the future, because increases in tropospheric temperatures lead to a lower proportion of precipitation falling as snow (O’Gorman, 2014; Rhoades et al., 2018; Zarzycki, 2018). However, there is *medium confidence* that extreme snowfall events associated with winter ETCs will change little in regions where snowfall will be supported in the future (O’Gorman, 2014; Zarzycki, 2018).

8.1.5 Extreme precipitation

SREX (p. 142)

Recent studies have updated the assessment of the AR4, with more regional results now available (Table 3-2). Overall, this additional evidence confirms that **more locations and studies show an increase than a decrease in extreme precipitation, but that there are also wide regional and seasonal variations**, and trends in many regions are not statistically significant (Table 3-2)... Based on station data from Canada, the United States, and Mexico, Peterson et al. (2008a) reported that heavy precipitation has been increasing over 1950-2004, as well as the average amount of precipitation falling on days with precipitation.

AR5 (pp. 213-14)

In summary, further analyses continue to support the AR4 and SREX conclusions that **it is likely that since 1951 there have been statistically significant increases in the number of heavy precipitation events (e.g., above the 95th percentile) in more regions than there have been statistically significant decreases, but there are strong regional and subregional variations in the trends**. In particular, many regions present statistically non-significant or negative trends, and, where seasonal changes have been assessed, there are also variations between seasons (e.g., more consistent trends in winter than in summer in Europe). The overall most consistent trends towards heavier precipitation events are found in central North America (very likely increase) but assessment for Europe shows likely increases in more regions than decreases.

AR6 (p. 1560)

In North America, there is robust evidence that the magnitude and intensity of extreme precipitation has *very likely* increased since the 1950s. Both [one-day maxima] and [5-day maxima] have significantly increased in North America during 1950-2018 (Sun et al., 2020, also Figure 11.13). There is, however, regional diversity. In Canada, there is a lack of detectable trends in observed annual maximum daily (or shorter duration) precipitation (Shephard et al., 2014; Mekis et al., 2015; Vincent et al., 2018).

NCA17 pp. 213-14:

Detectability of trends (compared to internal variability) for a number of precipitation metrics over the continental United States has been examined; **however, trends identified for the U.S. regions have not been clearly attributed to anthropogenic forcing**. One study concluded that increasing precipitation trends in some north-central U.S. regions and the extreme annual anomalies there in 2013 were at least partly attributable to the combination of anthropogenic and natural forcing... **Based on current evidence, it is concluded that detectable but not attributable increases in mean precipitation have occurred over parts of the central United States**. Formal detection-attribution studies indicate a human

contribution to extreme precipitation increases over the continental United States, but confidence is *low* based on those studies alone due to the short observational period, high natural variability, and model uncertainty.

In summary, based on available studies, it is concluded that for the continental United States there is *high confidence* in the detection of extreme precipitation increases, while there is *low confidence* in attributing the extreme precipitation changes purely to anthropogenic forcing.

8.1.6 Tornadoes and severe convective storms

IPCC AR6 Sct. 11.7.3, p. 1594

Severe convective storms are convective systems that are associated with extreme phenomena such as tornadoes, hail, heavy precipitation (rain or snow), strong winds, and lightning.

The assessment of changes in severe convective storms in SREX (Chapter 3, Seneviratne et al., 2012) and AR5 (Chapter 12, Collins et al., 2013) is limited and focused mainly on tornadoes and hail storms. The SREX assessed that there is *low confidence* in observed trends in tornadoes and hail because of data inhomogeneities and inadequacies in monitoring systems. Subsequent literature assessed in the Climate Science Special Report (Kossin et al., 2017) led to the assessment of the observed tornado activity over the 2000s in the USA, with a decrease in the number of days per year with tornadoes and an increase in the number of tornadoes on these days (*medium confidence*). However, there is *low confidence* in past trends for hail and severe thunderstorm winds. Climate models consistently project environmental changes that would support an increase in the frequency and intensity of severe thunderstorms that combine tornadoes, hail, and winds (*high confidence*), but there is *low confidence* in the details of the projected increase.

... In summary, because the definition of severe convective storms varies depending on the literature and the region, it is not straightforward to make a synthesizing view of observed trends in severe convective storms in different regions. In particular, observational trends in tornadoes, hail, and lightning associated with severe convective storms are not robustly detected due to insufficient coverage of the long-term observations. There is *medium confidence* that the mean annual number of tornadoes in the USA has remained relatively constant, but their variability of occurrence has increased since the 1970s, particularly over the 2000s, with a decrease in the number of days per year, and an increase in the number of tornadoes on these days (*high confidence*). Detected tornadoes have also increased in Europe, but the trend depends on the density of observations.

... It is extremely difficult to detect differences in time and space of severe convective storms (Kunkel et al., 2013). Although some ingredients that are favourable for severe thunderstorms have increased over the years, others have not; thus, overall, changes in the frequency of environments favourable for severe thunderstorms have not been statistically significant... For hailstorms, such as those that caused disasters in the USA in 2018, detection of the role of climate change in changing hail storms is more difficult, because hail storms are not, in general, directly simulated by convection-permitting models and not adequately represented by the environmental parameters of coarse-resolution GCMs (Mahoney, 2020).

In summary, it is extremely difficult to detect and attribute changes in severe convective storms. There is limited evidence that extreme precipitation associated with severe convective storms has increased in some cases.

8.1.7 Hurricanes and Tropical Cyclones

SREX (p. 159):

There have been no significant trends observed in global tropical cyclone frequency records, including over the present 40-year period of satellite observations (e.g., Webster et al., 2005). Regional trends in tropical cyclone frequency have been identified in the North Atlantic, but the fidelity of these trends is debated (Holland and Webster, 2007; Landsea, 2007; Mann et al., 2007a). Different methods for estimating undercounts in the earlier part of the North Atlantic tropical cyclone record provide mixed conclusions (Chang and Guo, 2007; Mann et al., 2007b; Kunkel et al., 2008; Vecchi and Knutson, 2008). Regional trends have not been detected in other oceans (Chan and Xu, 2009; Kubota and Chan, 2009; Callaghan and Power, 2011). **It thus remains uncertain whether any observed increases in tropical cyclone frequency on time scales longer than about 40 years are robust**, after accounting for past changes in observing capabilities (Knutson et al., 2010).

AR5 (pp. 216-17):

Current data sets indicate no significant observed trends in global tropical cyclone frequency over the past century and it remains uncertain whether any reported long-term increases in tropical cyclone frequency are robust, after accounting for past changes in observing capabilities (Knutson et al., 2010). **No robust trends in annual numbers of tropical storms, hurricanes and major hurricanes counts have been identified** over the past 100 years in the North Atlantic basin. Measures of land-falling tropical cyclone frequency (Figure 2.34) are generally considered to be more reliable than counts of all storms which tend to be strongly influenced by those that are weak and/or short lived. Callaghan and Power (2011) find a statistically significant decrease in Eastern Australia land-falling tropical cyclones since the late 19th century although including 2010/2011 season data this trend becomes non-significant (i.e., a trend of zero lies just inside the 90% confidence interval). Significant trends are not found in other oceans on shorter time scales (Chan and Xu, 2009; Kubota and Chan, 2009; Mohapatra et al., 2011; Weinkle et al., 2012), although Grinsted et al. (2012) find a significant positive trend in eastern USA using tide-gauge data from 1923–2008 as a proxy for storm surges associated with land-falling hurricanes. Differences between tropical cyclone studies highlight the challenges that still lie ahead in assessing long-term trends.

In summary, this assessment does not revise the SREX conclusion of *low confidence* that any reported long-term (centennial) increases in tropical cyclone activity are robust, after accounting for past changes in observing capabilities. More recent assessments indicate that **it is unlikely that annual numbers of tropical storms, hurricanes and major hurricanes counts have increased over the past 100 years in the North Atlantic basin**. Evidence, however, is for a virtually certain increase in the frequency and intensity of the strongest tropical cyclones since the 1970s in that region.

AR6 (p. 1585)

There is low confidence in most reported long-term (multidecadal to centennial) trends in TC frequency- or intensity-based metrics due to changes in the technology

used to collect the best-track data. This should not be interpreted as implying that no physical (real) trends exist, but rather as indicating that either the quality or the temporal length of the data is not adequate to provide robust trend detection statements, particularly in the presence of multidecadal variability.

There are previous and ongoing efforts to homogenize the best-track data (Elsner et al., 2008; Kossin et al., 2013, 2020; Choy et al., 2015; Landsea, 2015; Emanuel et al., 2018) and there is substantial literature that finds positive trends in intensity-related metrics in the best-track during the “satellite period”, which is generally limited to the past ~40 years (Kang and Elsner, 2012; Kishtawal et al., 2012; Kossin et al., 2013, 2020; Mei and Xie, 2016; Zhao et al., 2018; Tauvale and Tsuboki, 2019). **When best-track trends are tested using homogenized data, the intensity trends generally remain positive, but are smaller in amplitude** (Kossin et al., 2013; Holland and Bruyère, 2014). **Kossin et al. (2020) extended the homogenized TC intensity record to the period 1979–2017 and identified significant global increases in major TC exceedance probability of about 6% per decade.** In addition to trends in TC intensity, there is evidence that TC intensification rates and the frequency of rapid intensification events have increased within the satellite era (Kishtawal et al. 2012; Balaguru et al., 2018; Bhatia et al., 2018). The increase in intensification rates is found in the best-track as well as the homogenized intensity data.

A subset of the best-track data corresponding to hurricanes that have directly impacted the United States since 1900 is considered to be reliable, and shows no trend in the frequency of U.S. landfall events (Knutson et al., 2019).

Note: The **Underlined** text referenced a study (Kossin et al. 2020) that later retracted a portion of its findings. The authors assembled a data set on global TC incidence spanning 1979 to 2017. They claimed that the global fraction of TCs reaching major status (Cat 3–5) rose from 27% in the 1979–1997 interval to 31% in the 1998–2017 interval and the difference was statistically significant. Closer examination of their results however showed a significant increase was only observed in the North Atlantic (18% to 34%) whereas in every other basin (Eastern Pacific, Western Pacific, North Indian, South Indian, South Pacific) the differences were not statistically significant. Kossin et al. issued a Correction (<https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2021573117>). They now said that the global probability of observing a major TC was 34% in the 1979 to 1997 interval rising to 37% in the later period and the evidence for statistical significance was now weaker, although the authors claimed that the correction did not affect their conclusions.

8.1.8 Droughts

US NCA17 REPORT (Ch. 8, Wehner et al. 2017)

p. 231:

Recent droughts and associated heat waves have reached record intensity in some regions of the United States; however, by geographical scale and duration, the Dust Bowl era of the 1930s remains the benchmark drought and extreme heat event in the historical record (very high confidence). **While by some measures drought has decreased over much of the continental United States in association with long-term increases in precipitation, neither the precipitation increases nor inferred drought decreases have been confidently attributed to anthropogenic forcing.**

The human effect on recent major U.S. droughts is complicated. Little evidence is found for a human influence on observed precipitation deficits, but much evidence is found for a human influence on surface soil moisture deficits due to increased evapotranspiration caused by higher temperatures. (*High confidence*)

p. 233:

Drought is, of course, directly connected to seasonal precipitation totals. Figure 7.1 shows detectable observed recent changes in seasonal precipitation. In fact, the increases in observed summer and fall precipitation are at odds with the projections in Figure 7.5. **As a consequence of this increased precipitation, drought statistics over the entire CONUS have declined.**

SREX (p. 170)

From a paleoclimate perspective recent droughts are not unprecedented, with severe ‘megadroughts’ reported in the paleoclimatic record for Europe, North America, and Australia (Jansen et al., 2007). Recent studies extend this observation to African and Indian droughts (Sinha et al., 2007; Shanahan et al., 2009): much more severe and longer droughts occurred in the past centuries with widespread ecological, political, and socioeconomic consequences. Overall, these studies confirm that in the last millennium several extreme droughts have occurred (Breda and Badeau, 2008; Kallis, 2008; Büntgen et al., 2010).

In North America, there is *medium confidence* that there has been an overall slight tendency toward less dryness (wetting trend with more soil moisture and runoff; Table 3-2), although analyses for some subregions also indicate tendencies toward increasing dryness. This assessment is based on several lines of evidence, including simulations with different hydrological models as well as PDSI and CDD estimates (Alexander et al., 2006; Andreadis and Lettenmaier, 2006; van der Schrier et al., 2006a; Kunkel et al., 2008; Sheffield and Wood, 2008a; Dai, 2011).

The most severe droughts in the 20th century have occurred in the 1930s and 1950s, where the 1930s Dust Bowl was most intense and the 1950s drought most persistent (Andreadis et al., 2005) in the United States, while in Mexico the 1950s and late 1990s were the driest periods. Recent regional trends toward more severe drought conditions were identified over southern and western Canada, Alaska, and Mexico, with subregional exceptions (Dai, 2011).

SREX (p. 172)

Overall, though new studies have furthered the understanding of the mechanisms leading to drought, there is still relatively limited evidence to provide an attribution of observed changes, in particular given the issues associated with the availability of observational data (Section 3.2.1) and the definition and computation of drought indicators (Box 3-3). This latter point was mostly identified in post-AR4 studies (Box 3-3). Moreover, regions where consistent increases in drought are identified (see ‘Observed Changes’) are only partly consistent with those where projections indicate an enhancement of drought conditions in coming decades (see next paragraphs). We thus assess that there is *medium confidence* (see also Section 3.1.5) that anthropogenic influence has contributed to some changes in the drought patterns observed in the second half of the 20th century, based on its attributed impact on precipitation and temperature changes (though temperature can only

be indirectly related to drought trends; see Box 3-3). However **there is low confidence in the attribution of changes in droughts at the level of individual regions.**

AR5 (pp. 214-215)

Based on evidence since AR4, SREX concluded that there were not enough direct observations of dryness to suggest high confidence in observed trends globally, although there was *medium confidence* that since the 1950s some regions of the world have experienced more intense and longer droughts. The differences between AR4 and SREX are due primarily to analyses post-AR4, differences in how both assessments considered drought and updated IPCC uncertainty guidance.

Because drought is a complex variable and can at best be incompletely represented by commonly used drought indices, discrepancies in the interpretation of changes can result. For example, Sheffield and Wood (2008) found decreasing trends in the duration, intensity and severity of drought globally. Conversely, Dai (2011a,b) found a general global increase in drought, although with substantial regional variation and individual events dominating trend signatures in some regions (e.g., the 1970s prolonged Sahel drought and the 1930s drought in the USA and Canadian Prairies). Studies subsequent to these continue to provide somewhat different conclusions on trends in global droughts and/or dryness since the middle of the 20th century (Sheffield et al., 2012; Dai, 2013; Donat et al., 2013c; van der Schrier et al., 2013).

In summary, the current assessment concludes that there is not enough evidence at present to suggest more than low confidence in a global-scale observed trend in drought or dryness (lack of rainfall) since the middle of the 20th century, owing to lack of direct observations, geographical inconsistencies in the trends, and dependencies of inferred trends on the index choice. Based on updated studies, AR4 conclusions regarding global increasing trends in drought since the 1970s were probably overstated. However, it is *likely* that the frequency and intensity of drought has increased in the Mediterranean and West Africa and decreased in central North America and north-west Australia since 1950.

AR6 (Drought, Observed trends, Section 11.6.2, pp. 1573-75)

p. 1573

Strong precipitation deficits have been recorded in recent decades in the Amazon (2005, 2010), south-western China (2009–2010), south-western North America (2011–2014), Australia (1997–2009), California (2014), the middle East (2012–2016), Chile (2010–2015), the Great Horn of Africa (2011), among others (van Dijk et al., 2013; Mann and Gleick, 2015; Rowell et al., 2015; Marengo and Espinoza, 2016; Dai and Zhao, 2017; Garreaud et al., 2017, 2020; Marengo et al., 2017; Brito et al., 2018; Cook et al., 2018). **Global studies generally show no significant trends in SPI time series** (Orlowsky and Seneviratne, 2013; Spinoni et al., 2014), **and in derived drought frequency and severity data** (Spinoni et al., 2019), with very few regional exceptions (Section 11.9 and Figure 11.17).

p. 1574

For AR6 regions, several studies suggest an increase in the frequency and areal extent of soil moisture deficits, with examples in East Asia (Cheng et al., 2015; Y. Qin et al., 2015; Jia et al., 2018), Western and Central Europe (Trnka et al., 2015b), and the Mediterranean (Hanel et al., 2018; Moravec et al., 2019; Markonis et al., 2021). **Nonetheless, some analyses also**

show no long-term trends in soil drying in some AR6 regions – for example, in Eastern North America (Park Williams et al., 2017) and Central North America (Seager et al., 2019), as well as in North Eastern Africa (Kew et al., 2021).

There is evidence based on streamflow records of increased hydrological droughts in East Asia (D. Zhang et al., 2018) and southern Africa (Gudmundsson et al., 2019). **In areas of Western and Central Europe and Northern Europe, there is no evidence of changes in the severity of hydrological droughts since 1950** based on flow reconstructions (Caillouet et al., 2017; Barker et al., 2019) and observations (Vicente-Serrano et al., 2019). **In North America, depending on the methods, datasets and study periods, there are differences between studies that suggest an increase (Shukla et al., 2015; Udall and Overpeck, 2017) versus a decrease in hydrological drought frequency (Mo and Lettenmaier, 2018), but in general there is strong spatial variability** (Poshtiri and Pal, 2016). Streamflow observation reference networks of near-natural catchments have also been used to isolate the effect of climate trends on hydrological drought trends in a few regions, but these show limited trends in Northern Europe and Western and Central Europe (Stahl et al., 2010; Bard et al., 2015; Harrigan et al., 2018), North America (Dudley et al., 2020) and most of Australia, with the exception of Eastern and Southern Australia (X.S. Zhang et al., 2016).

p. 1575

Few AR6 regions show observed increases in meteorological drought (Section 11.9), mostly in Africa and South America (NES: *high confidence*; WAF, CAF, ESAF, SAM, SWS, SSA, SAS: *medium confidence*); a few others show a decrease (WSB, ESB, NAU, CAU, NEU, CNA: *medium confidence*). There are stronger signals indicating observed increases in agricultural and ecological drought (Section 11.9), which highlights the role of increased [evapotranspiration], driven by increased [Atmospheric Evaporative Demand], for these trends (Sections 11.6.2.3, 11.6.2.5). Past increases in agricultural and ecological droughts are found on all continents and several regions (WAF, CAF, WSAF, ESAF, WCA, ECA, EAS, SAU, MED, WCE, NES: *medium confidence*), while decreases are found only in one AR6 region (NAU: *medium confidence*). The more limited availability of datasets makes it more difficult to assess historical trends in hydrological drought at regional scale (Section 11.9). Increasing (MED: *high confidence*; WAF, EAS, SAU: *medium confidence*) and decreasing (NEU, SES: *medium confidence*) trends in hydrological droughts have only been observed in a few regions.

AR6 on Attribution (p. 1577)

There are only two AR6 regions in which there is at least *medium confidence* that human-induced climate change has contributed to changes in meteorological droughts (Section 11.9). In South-western South America (SSW), there is *medium confidence* that human-induced climate change has contributed to an increase in meteorological droughts (Boisier et al., 2016; Garreaud et al., 2020), while in Northern Europe (NEU), there is *medium confidence* that it has contributed to a decrease in meteorological droughts (Gudmundsson and Seneviratne, 2016) (Section 11.9). **In other AR6 regions, there is inconclusive evidence in the attribution of long-term trends, but a human contribution to single meteorological events or subregional trends has been identified in some instances... In North America, the human influence on precipitation deficits is complex (Wehner et al., 2017), with low confidence in the attribution of long-term changes in meteorological drought in AR6 regions.**

8.1.9 Summary

- Summary of IPCC and NCA findings To be added

8.2 Other global and continental indicators of extreme weather trends

8.2.1 Tropical Cyclones (TCs)

Hurricane strength records for the North Atlantic and the Western Pacific go back to 1950 and the record does not show an increase in either total or major TCs. Figure 8.2.1 was published by Roger Pielke Jr. as an update to the Best Track data series originally presented in Weinkle et al. (2012).

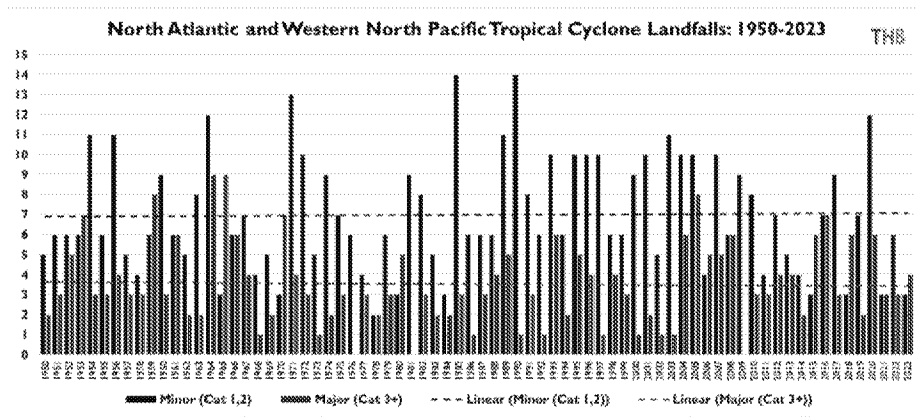


Figure 8.2. Tropical Cyclone Landfalls. Source: [[HYPERLINK "https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/global-tropical-cyclones"](https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/global-tropical-cyclones)], Weinkle et al. (2012)

After 1980, as shown in Figure 8.3, which reproduces data from the Climate Atlas of Dr. Ryan Maue neither the total number of hurricanes nor the frequency of major ones have become more common since 1980, indeed both have trended down since the 1990s:

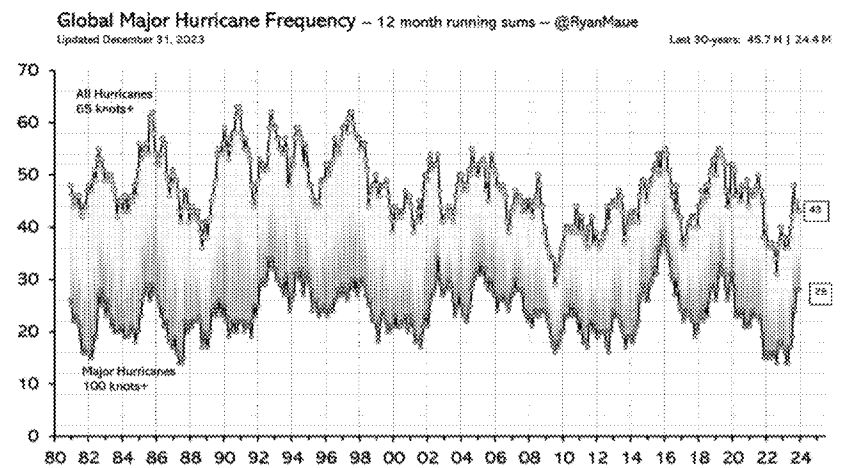


Figure 8.3: Global hurricane frequency. Source: Maue (2024)

A metric that combines the number and frequency of TCs is the Accumulated Cyclone Energy or ACE Index maintained at Colorado State University:

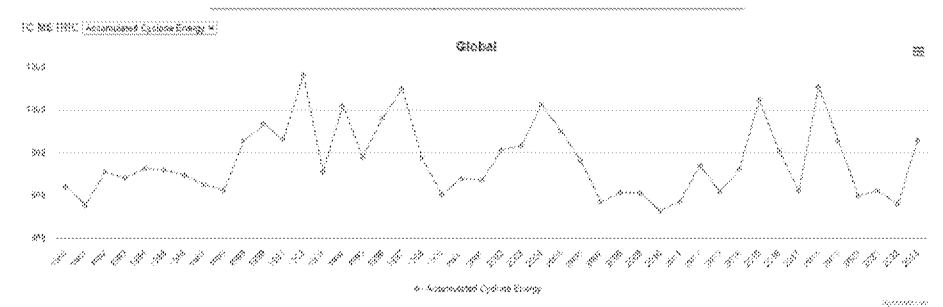


Figure 8.4: Global Accumulated Cyclone Energy. Source: Klotzbach (2025)
[[HYPERLINK "https://tropical.atmos.colostate.edu/Realtime/index.php?arch&loc=global"](https://tropical.atmos.colostate.edu/Realtime/index.php?arch&loc=global)]

As is clear, it is also not increasing and since 1990 has declined slightly.

Climate models show declining hurricane formation rates in a warming climate (Chand et al. 2022). Climate models also project fewer Tropical Cyclones under future global warming, and even though models project they will increase in strength, the annual averages of rainfall maxima decline (Stansfield et al. 2020). Note that Tu et al. (2024) report that the Power Dissipation Index (PDI), a measure of the destructiveness of hurricanes, has either remained unchanged or has declined in all global oceanic basins since the mid-1990s.

8.2.2 Wildfires

As shown in Figures 8.6 and 8.7 global wildfire activity as measured by European Space Agency peaked over a decade ago and shows a downward trend since.

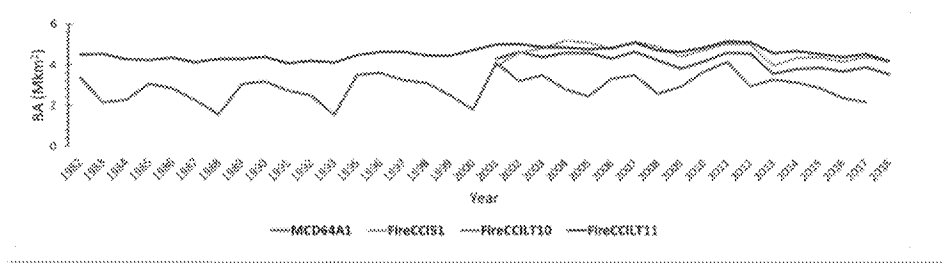


Figure 8.5: Global wildfire 1982-2018. Source: Copied from Oton et al. (2021). Note: the different coloured lines represent different data products based on satellites and algorithms used.

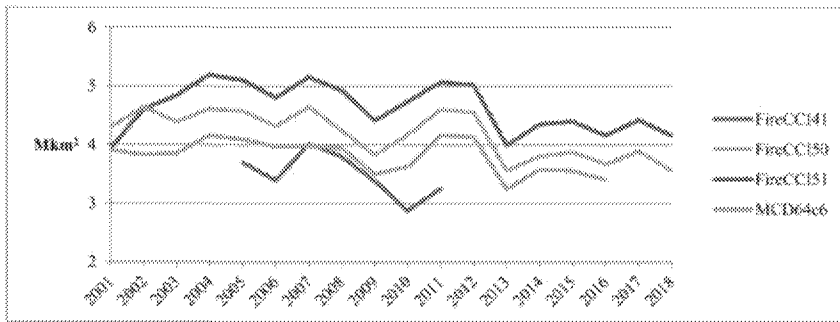


Figure 8.6: Global wildfire 2001-2018. Source: Copied from Lizundia-Loiola et al. (2021). Note: the different coloured lines represent different data products based on satellites and algorithms used

The pattern was summarized by Doerr and Santin (2016):

Wildfire has been an important process affecting the Earth's surface and atmosphere for over 350 million years and human societies have coexisted with fire since their emergence. Yet many consider wildfire as an accelerating problem, with widely held perceptions both in the media and scientific papers of increasing fire occurrence, severity and resulting losses. However, important exceptions aside, the quantitative evidence available does not support these perceived overall trends. Instead, global area burned appears to have overall declined over past decades, and there is increasing evidence that there is less fire in the global landscape today than centuries ago.

Regarding fire severity, limited data are available. For the western USA, they indicate little change overall, and also that area burned at high severity has overall declined compared to pre-European settlement. Direct fatalities from fire and economic losses also show no clear trends over the past three decades. Trends in indirect impacts, such as health problems from smoke or disruption to social functioning, remain insufficiently quantified to be examined. Global predictions for increased fire under a warming climate highlight the already urgent need for a more sustainable coexistence with fire. The data evaluation presented here aims to contribute to this by reducing misconceptions and facilitating a more informed understanding of the realities of global fire.

US data from the National Interagency Fire Centre (NIFC) from 1926 to 2023 are shown in Figure 8.7.

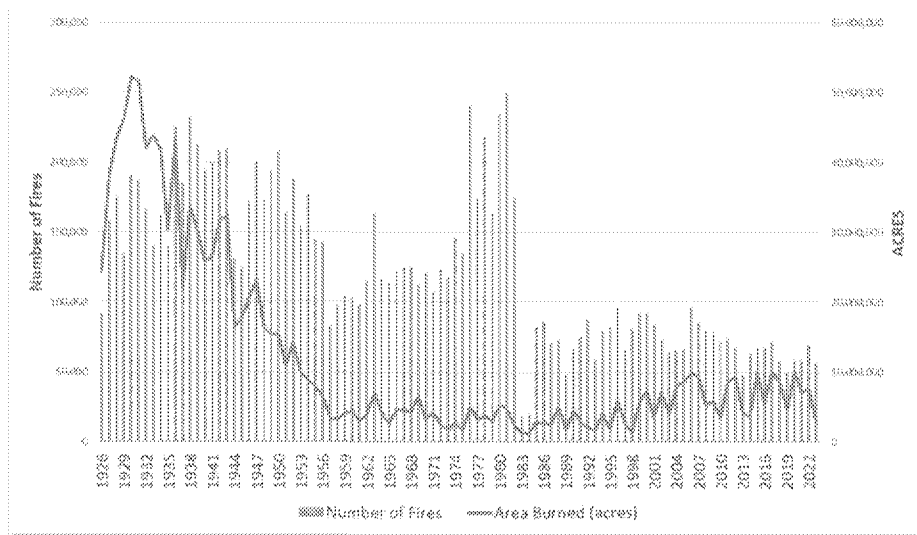


Figure 8.7: US wildfires 1926 to 2023. Source: National InterAgency Fire Centre data Pre-2017 (archived)

[[HYPERLINK](https://web.archive.org/web/20200212033452/https://www.nifc.gov/fireInfo/fireInfo_stats_totalFires.html) "Pre-2017":%20https://web.archive.org/web/20200212033452/https://www.nifc.gov/fireInfo/fireInfo_stats_totalFires.html"]. 2018-2023: [[HYPERLINK](https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/statistics/wildfires) "https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/statistics/wildfires"]

Note the NIFC has removed the pre-1960 data from its current website. They claim it is because measurement methods changed after 1960. This explanation seems inadequate since agencies blend temperature and extreme weather data series in other context when measurement systems changed. In this case if anything measurement of wildfires has improved since the early 20th century so any bias will be towards understating early wildfire counts. Nonetheless just focusing on the post-1985 interval the number of fires is not increasing. The area burned did increase but only until about 2007.

Marlon et al. (2012) used sedimentary charcoal layers to reconstruct fire history of western US back 1400 years. They also fit a model to predict expected fire activity as a function of climatic conditions. The results are summarized in the Figure below (from Figure 2 in their paper).

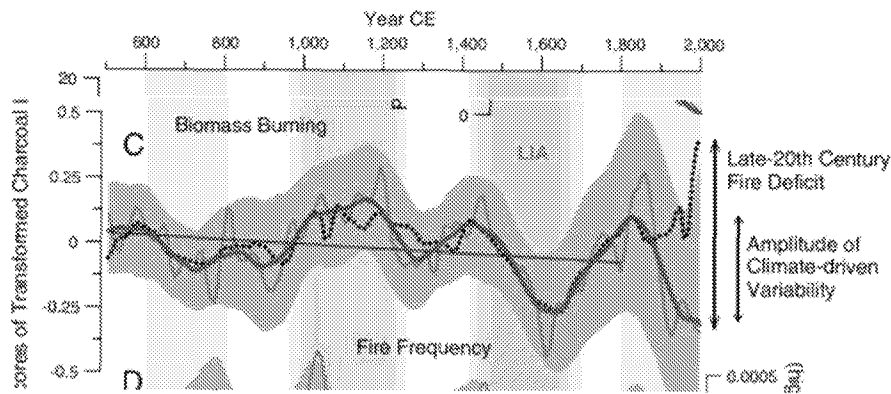


Figure 8.9: Fire frequency and fire deficit in the US. Source: Copied from Marlon et al. (2012)

In their figure the red line shows the smoothed charcoal record and the black dotted line shows the predicted charcoal record based on the statistical model. The gap at the end is the current Fire Deficit, covering the 20th century. In other words, however much fire was observed in the 20th century it was far less than what would have been observed in previous centuries based on the climatic conditions. The authors comment:

The fire deficit identified here might appear to contrast with observations of recent increases in western U.S. fire activity and also to the well established fire-climate interactions documented across the region. These apparent differences can be reconciled by explicit consideration of the time scale of the variations. We show that mean or baseline levels of biomass burned and fire frequency decreased substantially during the past century compared with previous centuries; **the recent increase in “fire activity” (i.e., large-wildfire occurrence) is therefore occurring during a period of unusually low levels of biomass burning.** ... During the past two centuries, however, centennial-scale changes in biomass burned and fire frequency however, are decoupled from climate due to the strong human influences on forests and fires. (p. E541)

Parks et al. (2025) has confirmed that despite the recent increase in wildfire burn area in North America, relative to historical wildfire regimes there remains a significant wildfire deficit.

8.2.3 Precipitation

Figure 8.5 shows that US long term data from NOAA shows an insignificantly increasing tendency toward extreme wetness (+0.001% per year)

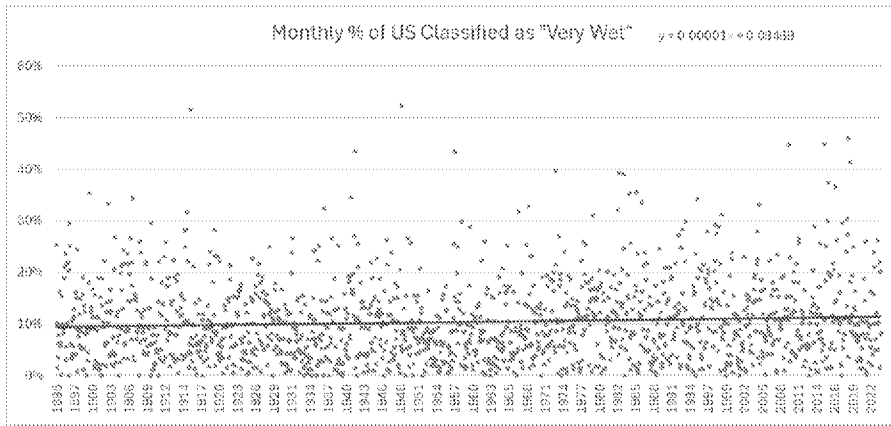


Figure 8.5: Long term US wetness (%). Source: NOAA [[HYPERLINK "https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/uspa/wet-dry/0"](https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/uspa/wet-dry/0)]

Precipitation will be discussed further in the review of CONUS data below.

8.2.4 Drought

As shown in Figure 8.6 US long term data (NOAA) shows an insignificantly declining tendency toward extreme dryness (-0.001% per year)

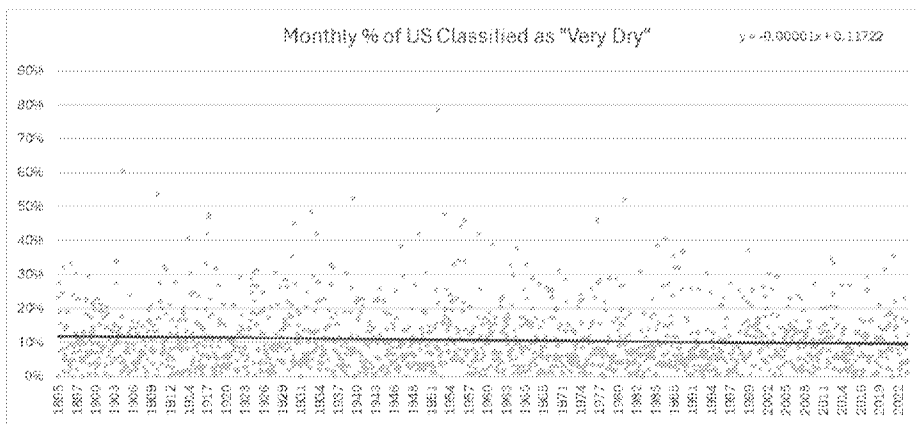


Figure 8.6: US dryness (%) 1895—2023. Source: NOAA [[HYPERLINK "https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/uspa/wet-dry/0"](https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/uspa/wet-dry/0)]

Kogan et al. (2020) examines a 38 year high-resolution satellite-based drought measure and concludes that global drought has not intensified and is not connected to climate change: “it is possible to state firmly that global and main grain countries’ drought area and intensity trends have not been following global climate warmings since 1980’s.”

8.2.5 Summary

Summary of other indicators to be added.

8.3 Analysis of Conterminous US (CONUS) data on temperature and precipitation extremes

8.3.1 Background: data limitations

Extremes in temperature and precipitation are generally events of short duration that often disrupt infrastructure and therefore human health and thriveability. Indeed, the ability of any surface-dwelling species to live productively is somewhat constrained by these near-surface air temperature or precipitation extremes which in essence create the bounding limits for survival. The issue here is whether these extremes, and their attendant potential danger, may be changing in response to increases in GHGs (e.g., IPCC AR6 Seneviratne et al. 2021).

Unfortunately, the sample of time from which we are able to undertake quantitative analysis of the variations of extreme events is quite brief, around 130 years. This period certainly does not begin to contain all of the extreme events that the climate system is able to generate. Over geologic time the climate system has generated an (essentially) infinite variety of patterns and extremes which humans have never observed, and thus do not enter our databases from which extreme statistics are determined. Thus, assuming that a new climate pattern or event in our lifetime is somehow the result of enhanced GHG concentrations requires the assumption that natural variations are insignificant. This is especially true for precipitation events. With this caveat in mind we examine the evidence for changes in weather and climate extremes.

8.3.2 CONUS daily temperatures are becoming less extreme

Daily maximum temperatures in the warm season (TMax, May-Sep) and daily minimum temperatures in the cold season (TMin, Dec-Mar) are available beginning in Dec 1898 (126 years). The dataset consists of 1,211 CONUS stations designated as United States Historical Climate Network or USHCN stations (Quinlan et al. 1987, Karl et al. 1990). These stations were selected by NOAA as having the fewest problematic issues with gaps, station moves and instrument changes. Where gaps still exist, nearby stations (bias-corrected) were merged so that the median volume of data available for a station is 98%. Although errors certainly reside in the dataset, with over 1,000 stations any underlying signal we discover can be characterized by relatively high confidence.

We begin with the question of whether the occurrence of daily record high or low temperatures changed has changed since Dec 1898. Each warm-season has 153 days (1 May to 30 Sep) and each cold-season has 122 days (1 Dec to 31 Mar). For each of these days and each of the stations station we calculated the year in which the record highest (lowest) temperature occurred. With 126 years of observations, if there were no temperature trends over time, on average, that a station would experience an average each year of 1.21 the expected number of records for TMax would be 1.21 per year and 0.96 records for TMin 0.96 per year. Figure 8.7 indicates the observed distribution in time of the occurrence of these extreme events.

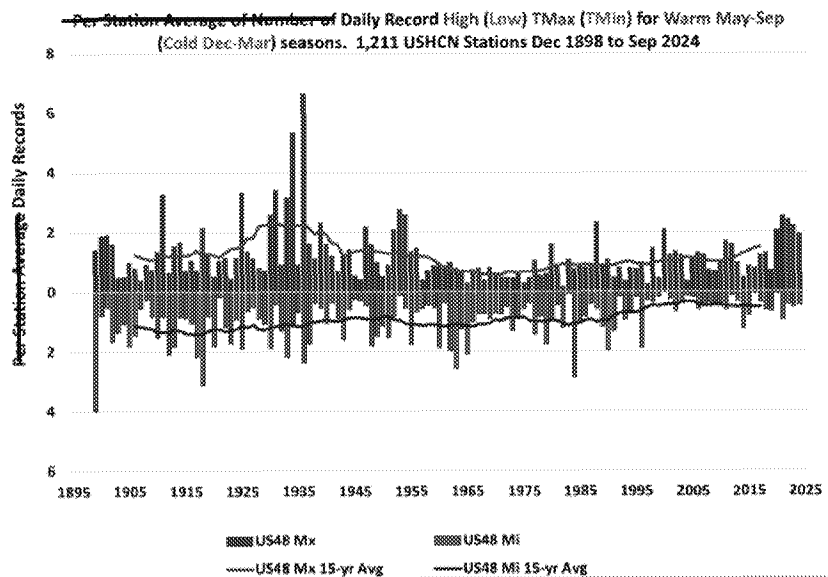


Figure 8.7. I don't think these are per station. I think they are totals across all 1,211 stations every year. E.g. there couldn't be 4 cold records per station in 1899. Per-station average of Number of daily record High (red) and Low (blue) for warm and cold seasons in the CONUS. The lines represent 15-year running, centered average. Source: 1,211 USHCN stations supplemented as needed to achieve a minimum of 92% of observations in the 126-year period since Dec 1898.

The results indicate a common feature in many metrics of warm-season extremes in the CONUS - the exceptional heat of the 1920s and especially the 1930s. On the cold side other extreme, the Valentine's Day Arctic outbreak in Feb 1899 stands as the most extensive cold extreme experienced by the CONUS, with 1917 2nd. Overall, the number of cold records has declined, especially over the past 25 years. The number of hot extremes has been uneven, reaching a peak in the 1930s. Combining the two records the reduction in numbers of both cold and hot extremes over the past century indicates a climate less prone to extremes.

This pattern is also shown in Figure 8.8. For each station and for each year the hottest warm season and coldest cold-season temperatures were calculated and converted to anomalies relative to the station's long term warm and cold season (respectively) averages. Then the differences between these were computed by station and averaged over all stations, thus yielding an annual measure of the expected range of local extreme temperatures for each year. Figure 8.8 shows the 15-year trailing average of this measure which has clearly declined over the past century.

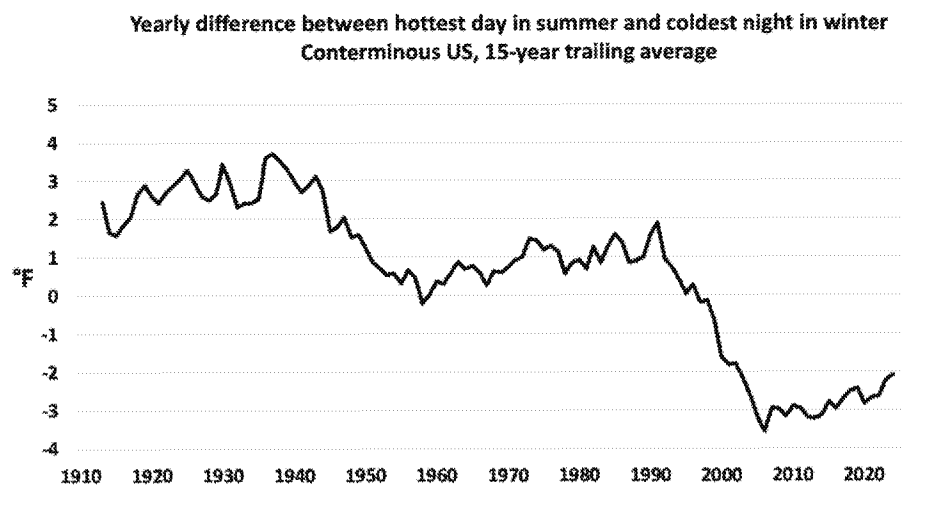


Figure 8.8. 15-year trailing average of the difference each year of each station's hottest warm-season TMax and coldest cold-season TMin relative to the long-term average.

~~Figure X shows that the~~ The average difference for each station between the hottest summer TMax and coldest winter TMin has declined about 5°F in the past 126 years. The decline is due mostly to warming winter TMin, but a decline in the magnitude of summer TMax is also a factor. The rise in TMin has been strongly related to the growing presence of manufactured surfaces around the weather stations over the last 100+ years (Spencer et al. 2025).

Summarizing Figures 8.7 and 8.8, while temperature extremes are regularly experienced in the US and attract a great deal of media attention, long term records show the US climate has become less extreme over time when measured in terms of the range between warm season maxima and cold season minima.

8.3.3 Exceedances of a heat threshold

Under the heading of "The Risk of Temperature Extremes is Changing", the most recent US National Climate Assessment report (NCA5) notes the increase in a threshold metric of number of days at or above 95°F, stating,

"The western US has been particularly affected by extreme heat since the 1980s ..., experiencing a larger increase in days over 95°F, as would be expected given the greater warming in that region relative to the eastern US."

Is the occurrence of 95°F days changing? In a climate as varied as that of CONUS threshold statistics can be misleading. A region with many stations which have near 95°F TMax average

temperatures in the summer might see large swings in the metric when only small changes in average temperature occur. Elsewhere with stations that either rarely or virtually always achieve 95°F TMax temperatures, a small change will not impact the results much at all. In the past 126 years, the average CONUS station experienced 129 days exceeding 95°C per 6-yr period, but the regional values range from 249 in the Pacific Southwest to 9 in the Northeast. Thus, one needs to view such threshold analyses with caution.

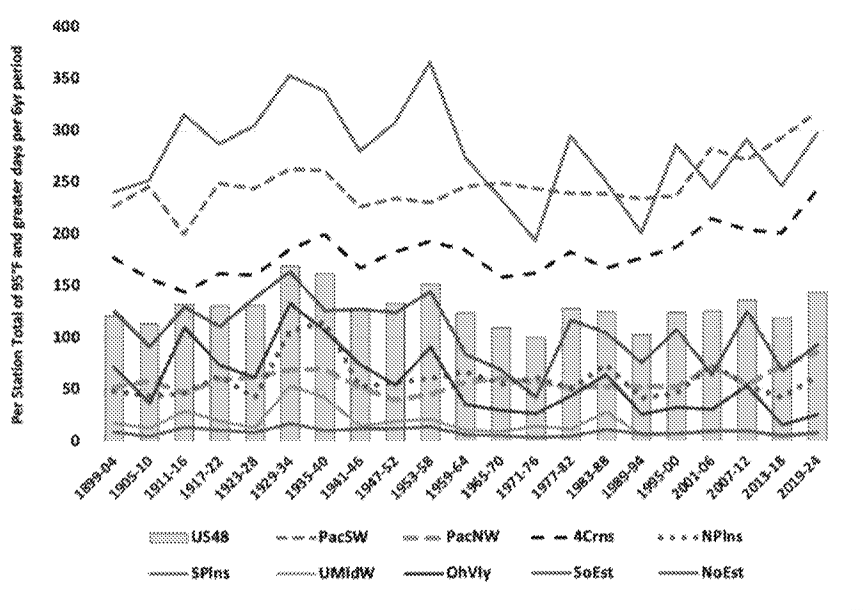


Figure 8.9. Per-station average of Total number of days > 95°F in 6-yr periods, US 48 (bars) and regions (lines).

In Fig. 8.9 we see that only three of the nine regions, all in the West, have experienced upward trends for in the number of 95°F or hotter days. The entire CONUS as a whole has not and the other six regions have experienced declines. The NCA5 heading "The Risk of Temperature Extremes is Changing" suggests positive trends are now being observed, but that is not evidenced in the combined results of Fig. 8.9. That the "Risk" is changing can thus be applied only to forecasts which is addressed in section XX

8.3.4 Heatwaves

Of more impact than a single daily record is the phenomena of heatwaves, or consecutive days which exceed an extreme threshold. For this study, the metric will be the number of "Heatwave Days" defined as the sum of all days in May-Sep each year which exceed the 90th percentile on consecutive days of at least seven days in length.

Why 7 days? Various HW definitions:

[[HYPERLINK "https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/learn-about/weather/types-of-weather/temperature/heatwave"](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/learn-about/weather/types-of-weather/temperature/heatwave)] says 3 days above regional threshold in 25-28°C range
 US [[HYPERLINK "https://www.weather.gov/safety/heat-during"](https://www.weather.gov/safety/heat-during)] says 2 hot days (no specified threshold)
 WMO says [[HYPERLINK "https://wxguys.ssec.wisc.edu/2019/07/22/what-is-a-heat-wave-2/"](https://wxguys.ssec.wisc.edu/2019/07/22/what-is-a-heat-wave-2/)] at least 5°C above the local average.
 So we need to ensure that the conclusions in this section are robust to heatwave definition

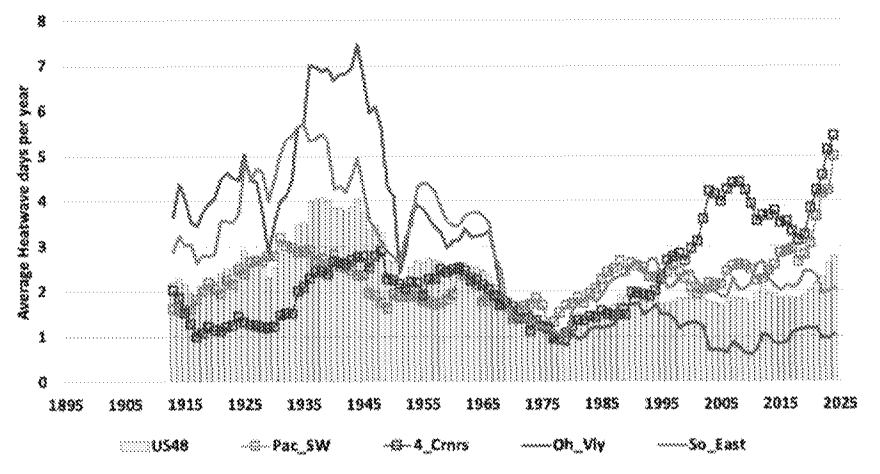


Figure 8.10 15-year trailing average of number of heatwave days per year per station in the CONUS (bars) and four regions: Pac_SW (orange squares, CA, NV), 4_Crnrs (red squares, AZ,NM,UT,CO), Oh_Vly (blue, MO, IL, KY, TN, IN, OH, WV) and So_East (green, MS, AL, GA, FL, SC, NC, VA).

Figure 8.10 indicates again the excessive heat of the first half of the 20th century, primarily in the eastern two-thirds of the nation, as seen in the sub-regional values for the Ohio Valley and the Southeast as examples. The West has seen a recent increase of heatwave days and the two sub-regions with the highest number are shown, the Pacific Southwest and the Four-Corners (NCA5). This indicates that the background warm season circulation favored heatwaves in the eastern portions of the country in the first half of the 20th century, but in the 21st century the patterns have favored heatwaves in the West.

Urban influences

~~Regarding a different heatwave metric,~~ The NCA5 directs readers to the website [[HYPERLINK "https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves"](https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves)] (USGCRP 2023) to view the number of urban heatwaves by decade from the 1960s. The figure reveals a monotonic increase in each decade from 2 per decade in the 1960s to 6 by the 2020s. The definition of a heatwave is ~~unusual here~~—a period of at least 2 consecutive days when the apparent minimum temperature (combination of temperature and humidity) exceeds the 85th percentile. More importantly, the dataset is limited to the 50 largest cities in the US.

These results presented in USGCRP (2023) are entirely reasonable, but for reasons unrelated to GHG emissions. Urbanization in these cities is a major factor in the rise of TMin relative to TMax

and to TMin at rural stations. Also, the decades of the 1960s and 1970s were the two coldest decades since the 1910's, so the starting date preconditions the time series to show warming. This does not dismiss the real rise in nighttime temperatures in major US cities and the impacts associated with these changes. However, we note for a variety of reasons that summer TMax (especially in rural areas) serves as better response variable for detecting potential changes in heatwaves influenced by changes in the background climate due, for example, to increasing GHGs – ~~our concern in this document~~ (Christy et al. 2009). For the CONUS as a whole, the evidence in this section suggests GHG emissions have had little-to-no effect on heatwaves in the CONUS.

8.3.5 Extremes in daily precipitation.

Due to its stochastic and episodic character, precipitation requires careful statistical treatment to understand variability over long time periods. The US National Climate Assessments (NCA4, NCA5) have highlighted an increase in the occurrence of the heaviest precipitation events (defined in different ways) primarily in the eastern half of the CONUS, especially the Northeast, when starting in either 1901 or 1958. Interestingly, the regional variations indicate that the largest increases in extreme events are in the Northeast and least in the West, which is counter to the changes in temperature extremes shown above.

McKittrick and Christy (2019) examined long-term and consistent station observations of daily precipitation to test some of these NCA claims for the Southeast and West Coast. In neither case when the time series were extended back in time (as far as 1872 in some cases) or when starting later (1978) were the trends significant. For this report we update these findings with similarly constructed observations from 29 stations on the Pacific Coast (1893ff from San Diego CA to Blaine WA, see Figure 8.11), 24 stations in the humid Southeast (1872ff from Austin TX to Washington DC, see Figure 8.12), and 21 stations in the Northeast (1888ff from Buffalo NY to Portland ME—the ~~region where trends are greatest~~, see Figure 8.13).

In the Pacific region over the whole sample the trend in average precipitation is negative and significant in Astoria and insignificant elsewhere, the trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant only in Big Sur. The trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant in Aberdeen and Big Sur and negative and significant in Newport. Averaged over all stations in the region none of these three trend parameters is statistically significant.

In the Southeast region over the whole sample the trend in average precipitation is positive and significant only in Mobile and Quitman, the trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant only in Mobile and the trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant only in Vicksburg and Norfolk. Averaged over all stations in the region none of these three trend parameters is statistically significant.

-Need NE data

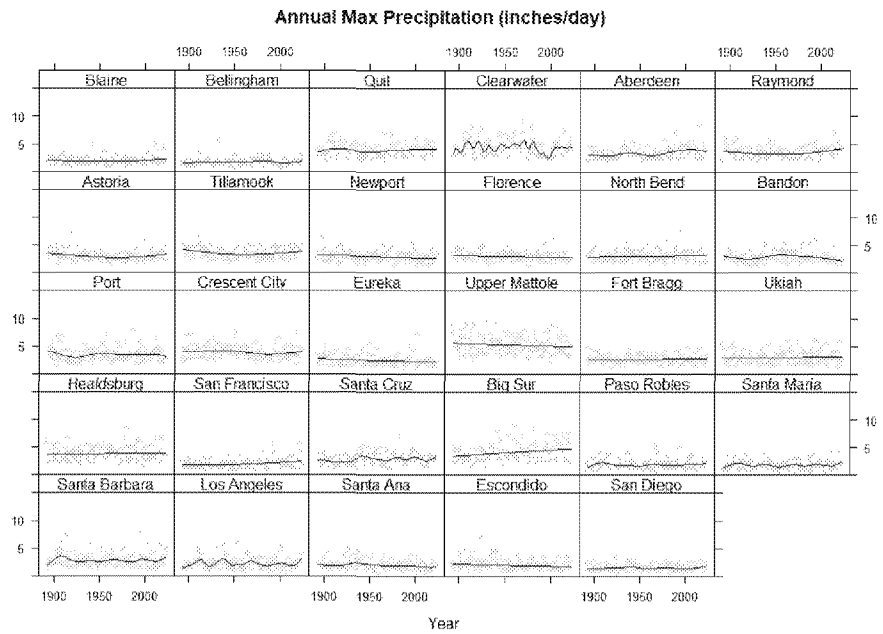


Figure 8.11 Annual maximum precipitation for 29 Pacific stations 1893 to present

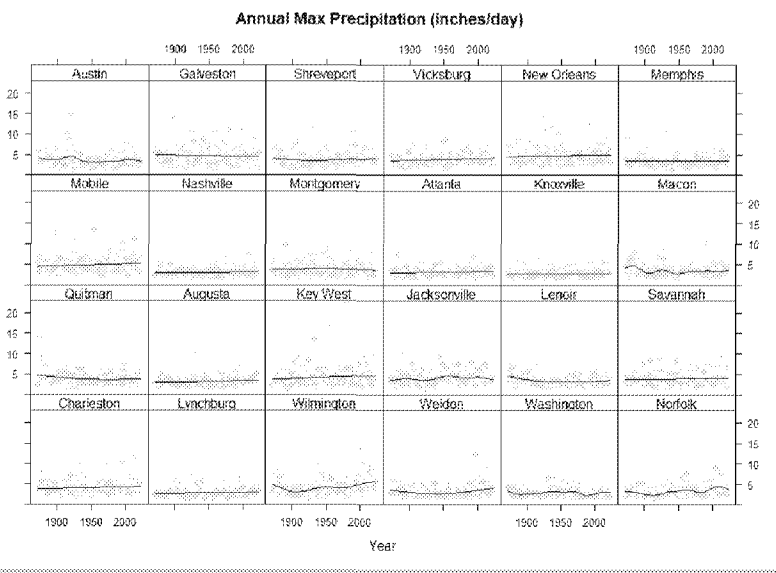


Figure 8.12 Annual maximum precipitation for 24 Southeast stations 1872 to present

To be added

Figure 8.13 Annual maximum precipitation for xx Northeast stations xxxx to present

Pacific Coast heavy rainfall events

The Pacific Coast receives considerable amounts of precipitation from Atmospheric River (AR) events which often last more than a day or two. The worst-known such event in recent history occurred between December 1861 and January 1862, which dumped nearly 10 feet of rain in parts of California and submerged the entire Central Valley under as much as 15 feet of water (Brewer 1930, Porter et al. 2011). Six megastorms more severe than 1861–1862 have occurred in California during the last 1800 years, occurring at intervals of 200 years or so (Null and Hulbert 2007).

We examine occurrences of 5-day deluges as follows. In a 130-year span there are 26 5-year intervals. At each location we computed the 5-day precipitation totals throughout the year and selected the 26 highest values. Each of those can be thought of as 1-in-5yr events. If there are no trends in precipitation then the total number of these events across all stations should be evenly spread out on an annual basis. In Fig. 8.14 we show the distribution in time of these events the 26 heaviest 5-day precipitation totals (nominal 1-in-5yr occurrence). The deluges associated with the massive 1997-98 El Niño event are readily apparent. While erratic, as is typical of these types of precipitation metrics, there is no indication of a tendency to change become more frequent over time.

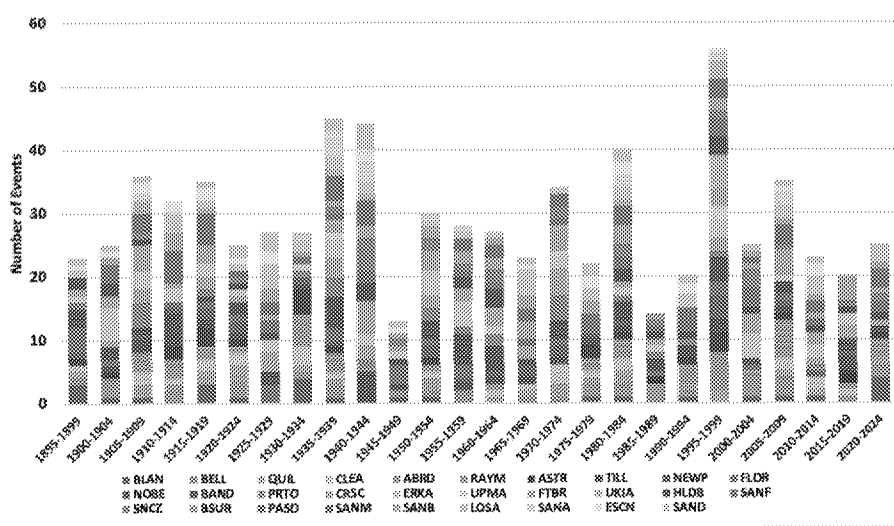


Figure 8.14. The time distribution by 5-year periods of the 26 heaviest occurrences for each station (i.e., nominal 1-in-5 year event). [Curry: I FIND THIS DIAGRAM VERY DIFFIULT TO INTERPRET, EVEN THE STATION NAMES] [RM: I recommend removing the colour coding and simply showing the totals across all locations. Color-coding the locations does not add useful information and makes the chart confusing.]

Southeast heavy rainfall events

The temporal pattern of 5-day totals of the 1-in-5yr heavy events in the humid Southeast (Figure 8.15) is generally unremarkable, though a cluster of higher values appears in 1995 to 2019. The increase in those years is due largely to the 4 northeastern-most stations of Wilmington NC, Weldon NC, Washington DC, and Norfolk VA. This confirms the pattern indicated in NCA4 and NCA5 of a tendency for an increasing frequency of heavy events, due to a temporal clustering of tropical storms, from eastern NC to Maine discussed below. Otherwise, the remaining 20 stations show an unremarkable temporal distribution of heavy events.

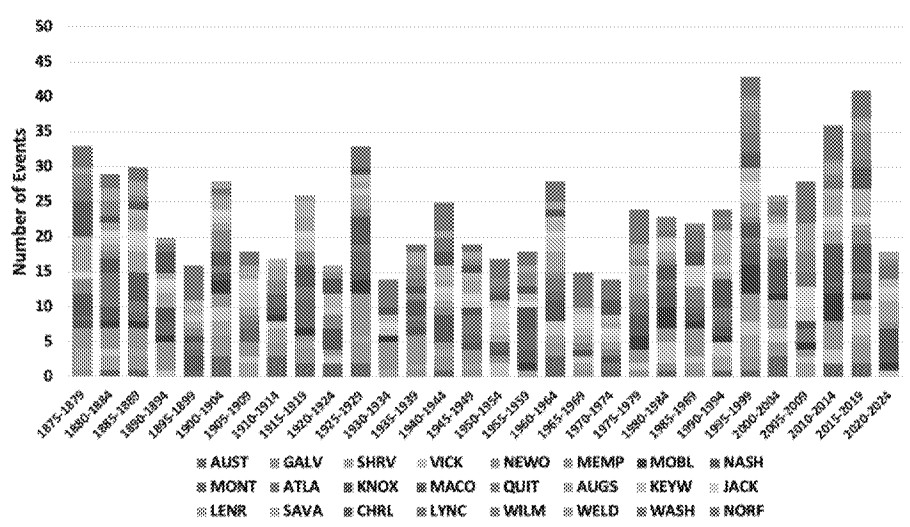


Figure 8.15. As above but for the 30 heaviest 1-in-5yr events for 24 stations in the humid Southeast from Austin TX to Washington DC in 5-year bins for 1875-2025. Figure X. The time distribution by 5-year periods of the 26 heaviest occurrences for each station (i.e., nominal 1-in-5 year event). [JCurry: I FIND THIS DIAGRAM VERY DIFFIULT TO INTERPRET, EVEN THE STATION NAMES] [RM: I recommend removing the colour coding and simply showing the totals across all locations. Color-coding the locations does not add useful information and makes the chart confusing.]

Northwest heavy rainfall events

Fig. 8.16 shows the 27 (1-in-5yr) heaviest 3-day events for the last 135 years in 21 stations in the Northeast (including Montreal Canada). We use 3-day totals here as this produced the largest variations in time. In this region, 72% of the events occur during June to October and are dominated by tropical incursions of hurricanes, tropical storms or tropical storms that transition to extratropical systems.

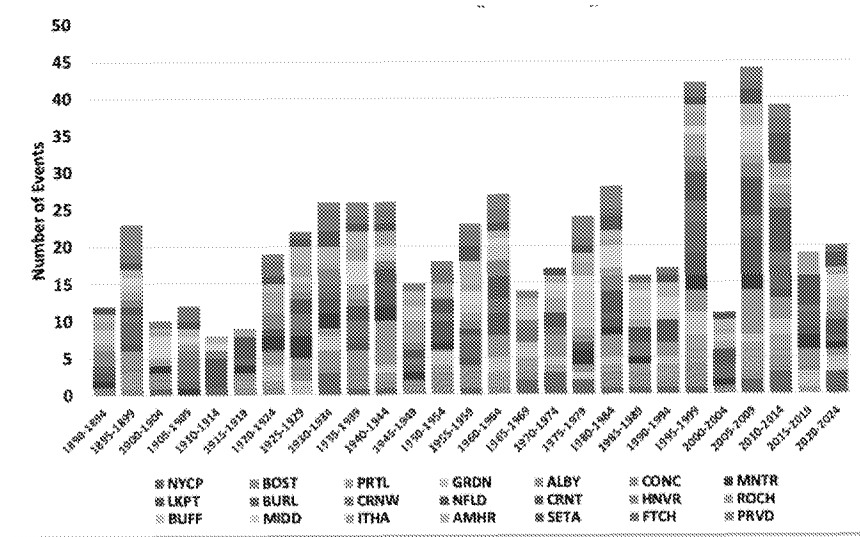


Figure 8.16. Time distribution of the heaviest 27 (1-in-5yr) heaviest 3-day precipitation events for 21 stations from NY to ME, including Montreal. AGAIN I FIND INTERPRETING THIS FIGURE VERY DIFFICULT [RM: I recommend removing the colour coding and simply showing the totals across all locations.]

Howarth et al. (2019) report differences in the Northeast between two 18-year periods: 1979-96 and 1997-2014 (a similar region as in Fig. 8.16 that includes PA and NJ) of various precipitation extremes, one of which indicated a dramatic increase (317%) in the 24-hr events involving at least 6 inches of rainfall. This high increase is due to the very small numbers of such events of which there were only 6 in the first period and 25 in the second. Most of the stations did not record such an event suggesting these erratic, episodic events over brief, 18-yr periods, need scrutiny by additional statistical methods.

Using the information in Fig. 8.16 over the same years as Howarth et al. we find a 51% increase in the frequency of heavy events between the two periods. One can see in Fig. 8.16 that it was unfortunate that Howarth et al. ended in 2014 prior to a return to the long-term average of such events.

A feature of Howarth et al. is the use of single day totals which is questionable because extreme events are often spread across the observation time boundary, so that stations measuring at 0700 LT versus those at Midnight will have differing results and which would then have major impacts on counting rare events. We use the 3-day totals in Fig. 8.16 to be sure to capture the extent of these short events. In any case, we can confirm that the period 1997 to 2014 provided a cluster of heavier events as Howarth et al. have documented.

Howarth's most remarkable claim (317% increase in 6" days) is potentially misleading because it is a threshold statistic (see above under Heat Threshold) and involving a ratio of small numbers over

a short period. The result is not representative of *relative* extreme events for the whole region since the majority of stations never experienced a 6" total. Fig. 8.16 above determines the same number of events for each station (27 heaviest events) whose heaviest events ranged from 4.4" to 12.5" and 27th heaviest event ranged from 3.3" to 5.0". This analysis thus normalizes the extremes so each station is equally represented. Note too that the period of record here is 135 years vs. 36 years in Howarth et al. Except for three 5-year periods between 1995 and 2014 there is nothing statistically remarkable about the results.

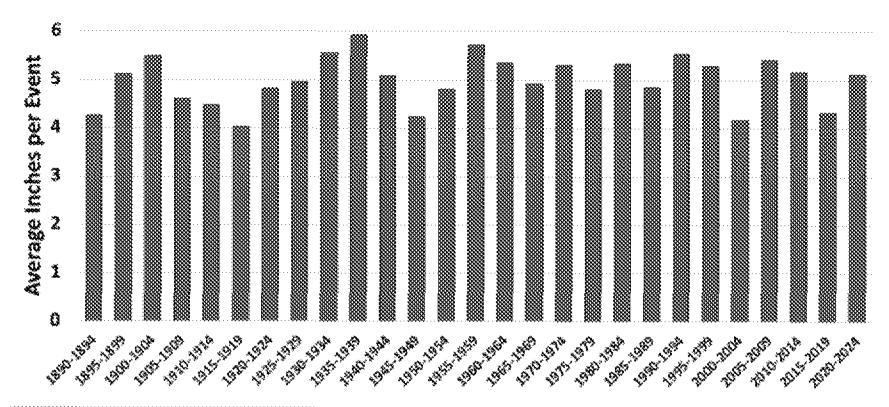


Figure 8.17. Average amount of precipitation falling in the 1-in-5yr events for the NE stations.

An interesting aspect of Northeast precipitation is that there has been no change in the amount of precipitation per heaviest event, as shown in Fig. 8.17. The trend is only +0.02"/decade. This result suggests that though there was an uptick in the number of events during the period 1995 to 2014 the events, individually, are not becoming more intense.

Jong et al. (2024) document the increase of tropical influences on precipitation events in the Northeast since 1959 and concluded, "The autumn extreme precipitation trend over the Northeast US is primarily attributed to tropical cyclone-related events since the 1990s." The question then becomes, was the temporal clustering of tropical systems in 1997-2014 which affected the Northeast a response to increasing GHGs? Jong et al. examined CMIP-6 model output which suggests that there will be fewer such systems in the 21st century but that the intensity of the rainfall events might increase. This conjecture is not seen in Fig. 8.17 where the amount-per-event has remained steady over the 135-year period.

The evidence from the historical record of extreme precipitation events is generally not consistent from region to region so that inferences regarding trends and their projections are wrought with significant uncertainty. In most regions and perhaps all, it is our opinion that the very nature of the erratic and episodic character of extreme precipitation events renders the discovery of statistically significant changes a result yet to be achieved (McKittrick and Christy 2019).

URBAN HEAT ISLAND IS ALSO A FACTOR IN RAINFALL EXTREMES, MAYBE SOMETHING ABOUT THIS

ADD SUMMARY SECTION WITH MAIN CONCLUSIONS

References

Christy, J.R. W. Norris and R.T. McNider, 2009. Surface temperature variations in East Africa and possible causes. *J. Climate*, 22, 3342-3356. DOI: 10.1175/2008JCLI2726.1.

Gershunov, A. and K. Guirguis, 2012. California heat waves in the present and future. *Geophys. Res. Lett.* [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2012GL052979>"]

Howarth, M.E., C.D. Thorncroft and L.F. Bosart, 2019, Changes in extreme precipitation in the Northeast United States: 1979-2014. *J. Hydromet.* 20, 673-689. DOI: 10.1175/JHM-D-18-0155.1

Jong, B.-T., Murakami, H., Delworth, T. L., & Cooke, W. F. (2024). Contributions of tropical cyclones and atmospheric rivers to extreme precipitation trends over the Northeast US. *Earth's Future*, 12, e2023EF004370. <https://doi.org/10.1029/2023EF004370>

Karl, T.R., C.N. Williams, Jr., F.T. Quinlan, and T.A. Boden, 1990: United States Historical Climatology Network (HCN) Serial Temperature and Precipitation Data, Environmental Science Division, Publication No. 3404, Carbon Dioxide Information and Analysis Center, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Oak Ridge, TN, 389 pp.

Mass, C., D. Owens, J. Christy, and R. Conrick, **2024**: The Pacific Northwest heat wave of 25-30 June 2021: Synoptic/Mesoscale conditions and climate perspective. *Weather and Forecasting*, 39. DOI: 10.1175/WAF-D-23-0154.1.

McKittrick, R. and J.R. Christy, **2019**: Assessing changes in US regional precipitation on multiple time scales. *J. Hydro.* 578, (2019), DOI.ORG/10.1016/j.jhydrol.2019.124074

Overland, J. E., 2021: Causes of the record-breaking Pacific Northwest heatwave, late June 2021. *Atmosphere*, 12, 1434, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3390/atmos12111434>" \t "_blank"]

NCA4, Climate Science Special Report: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume I, 2017. Wuebbles, D.J., D.W. Fahey and K.A. Hibbard .eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program. Washington DC, USA. doi: 10.7930/J0J964J6. [HYPERLINK "<https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/19486>"]

NCA5, Fifth National Climate Assessment. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH1>"]

Philip, S. Y., Kew, S. F., van Oldenborgh, G. J., Anslow, F. S., Seneviratne, S. I., Vautard, R., Coumou, D., Ebi, K. L., Arrighi, J., Singh, R., van Aalst, M., Pereira Marghidan, C., Wehner, M., Yang, W., Li, S., Schumacher, D. L., Hauser, M., Bonnet, R., Luu, L. N., Lehner, F., Gillett, N., Tradowsky, J. S., Vecchi, G. A., Rodell, C., Stull, R. B., Howard, R., and Otto, F. E. L.: Rapid attribution analysis of the extraordinary

heat wave on the Pacific coast of the US and Canada in June 2021, *Earth Syst. Dynam.*, 13, 1689–1713, <https://doi.org/10.5194/esd-13-1689-2022>, 2022.

Quinlan, F. T., T. R. Karl, and C. N. Williams Jr. (1987), United States Historical Climatology Network (USHCN) serial temperature and precipitation data, NDP-019, Carbon Dioxide Inf. Anal. Cent., Oak Ridge Natl. Lab., U.S. Dep. of Energy, Oak Ridge, Tenn.

USGCRP, 2023: USGCRP Indicators Platform: Heat Waves. U.S. Global Change Research Program. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves>" \t "_blank"]

White, R.H., Anderson, S., Booth, J.F. *et al.* The unprecedented Pacific Northwest heatwave of June 2021. *Nat Commun* **14**, 727 (2023). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-023-36289-3>"]

Weinkle, Jessica, Ryan Maue and Roger Pielke Jr. (2012) Historical Global Tropical Cyclone Landfalls *Journal of Climate* 25(13) 4729–4735 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/JCLI-D-11-00719.1>" \t "_blank"]

Tu, Shifei, Zhenzhen Hu, Mei Liang, Wen Zhou, Johnny Chan and Jianjun Xu (2024) Decreasing trend in destructive potential of tropical cyclones in the South Indian Ocean since the mid-1990s. *Communications Earth and Environment* 5:543 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01683-2>"]

William Brewer, *Up and Down California in 1860–1864 The Journal of William H. Brewer* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1930).

Keith Porter et al., *Overview of the Arkstorm Scenario* (Reston, VA: Dept. of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey, 2011).

Jan Null and Joelle Hulbert, "California Washed Away: The Great Flood of 1862," *Weatherwise* 60, no. 1 (2007): 26–30, <https://doi.org/10.3200/wewi.60.1.26-30>.

Summary:
-to be added

(May 14 RM edit: some wording changes, removed orphan Figure 12.1, corrected Gasparini and other references)

12 Mortality risks from heat and cold temperature extremes

12.1 Heat and cold risks

Changes in temperature extremes are among the most certain impacts expected in a warming world. Extreme heat events are expected to become more frequent while extreme cold events become less frequent. This pattern The greatest confidence for impacts from global warming is an increase in extreme heat events and a decrease in extreme cold events; this has been observed is evident in the historical period (as discussed in Section XX Chapter 7) and is also expected to intensify continue with sustained further warming.

Mortality from during heat extremes is typically caused by heat stroke and heat exhaustion, while, m Mortality from during cold extremes is typically caused by hypothermia and heart strain. It is well known that global mortality is substantially greater for extreme cold conditions than for extreme heat conditions.^{1,2a} Unlike with heat-related mortality, cold-weather risks act in even at moderately cold conditions (Gasparini et al. 2015, Lee and Dessler 2023). A 13-country study of 74 million deaths from 1985 to 2012 estimated that, on average, 7.7% of deaths were attributable to sub-optimal temperatures, of which 7.4% were attributable to cold and only 0.4% were attributable to heat (Gasparini et al. 2015). In other words cold weather killed 18.5 times as many people as did hot weather.

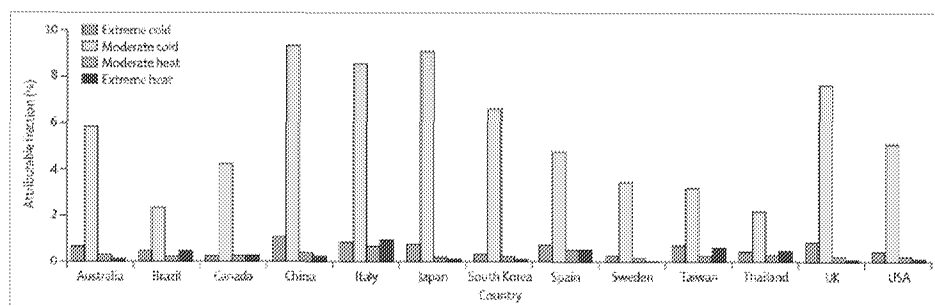


Figure 12.1. Mortality attributable to extreme and moderate cold and heat by country. Source: reproduced from Gasparini et al. (2015).

¹ Qi Zhao et al., “Global, Regional, and National Burden of Mortality Associated with Non-Optimal Ambient Temperatures from 2000 to 2019: A Three-Stage Modelling Study,” *The Lancet Planetary Health* 5, no. 7 (July 2021), [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2542-5196\(21\)00081-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2542-5196(21)00081-4).

² <https://ourworldindata.org/part-one-how-many-people-die-from-extreme-temperatures-and-how-could-it-change-in-the-future>

^{2a} <https://ourworldindata.org/part-one-how-many-people-die-from-extreme-temperatures-and-how-could-it-change-in-the-future>

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: 11 pt, Not Bold, Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: 11 pt, Not Bold, Italic

Formatted: Font: 11 pt, Not Bold

Formatted: Font: Bold

Figure 12.1 shows the distribution of results from Gasparini et al. (2015) by country. For the United States the fraction of deaths attributable to temperature was 5.9%, of which 5.5% was due to cold, thus cold weather killed 14 times as many people as hot weather. Specifically, with regards to the specific to the U.S., extreme heat and extreme cold both kill hundreds of people each year; however, different approaches to assessing heat/cold mortality produce different results. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics Compressed Mortality Database, which is based on death certificates, indicates that about twice as many people die of “excessive cold” conditions in a given year than of “excessive heat.”^{4,5}

There is strong evidence that people adapt to weather risks. A 2015 epidemiological study of deaths⁴ as published in *The Lancet* found that cold-related deaths in the U.S. were about a factor of fifteen higher than heat-related deaths.⁶ However, the study did not adjust for the seasonal cycle in mortality rates, which tend to increase during the winter months due to non-weather factors like influenza.⁷ A more recent paper Lee and Dessler (2023) found reported that 86% of temperature-related deaths across 40 cities in the U.S. are were due to cold-related mortality, and that due to adaptation the relative risk of death declined in hot and cold cities alike as seasonal temperatures increased. Allen and Sheridan (2018) found that short, early-season cold events were 2 to 5 times deadlier than hot events, but the mortality risk of both cold and hot extremes drops to nearly zero if the events occur late in the season.⁸

Formatted: No widow/orphan control

Formatted: Font: 11.5 pt

⁴ Ross R., Schellert et al., “The Direct Footprint of Climate Change from Cancers to Diseases to People,” *Science*, 354, no. 6313 (November 11, 2016), 12621. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaf7671>"]

⁵ Rachel H. Akse, Scott E. Hurler, J. Darius Wilson, Randa A. Mason, and Brandon Saloner, “Trends in Polypharmacy-Associated Deaths Involving Opioids, Stimulants, and Benzodiazepines by Race and Ethnicity in the U.S., 2007-2021,” *Health Affairs*, 42, no. 3 (March 2023): 2232-2239. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.8249>"]

⁶ James G. Thompson et al., “Climate Change and Health: Health and Climate Change Policy Responses to Present Risks to Health,” *The Lancet*, 386, no. 10006 (November 7, 2015): 1861-1914. [HYPERLINK "[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)00544-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)00544-6)"]

⁷ Rob Hansen, “Which Kills More People: Extreme Heat or Extreme Cold?” *Weather Underground*, January 22, 2019. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.weatherunderground.com/463W-Which-Kills-More-People-Extreme-Heat-or-Extreme-Cold>"]

⁸ Tank Benamar et al., “Deaths Attributable to Heat and Cold: Comparison of Data Sources and Implication of Inconsistency,” *Geofhealth*, 8, no. 3 (March 2024): 2103011606392. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2023GH000799>"]

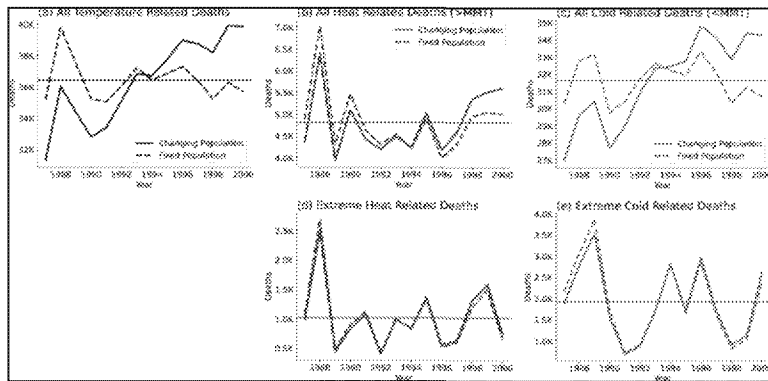


Figure 12.1 Time series of temperature-related deaths across all 106 cities. (a) The solid line represents total temperature-related deaths, while the dashed line indicates temperature-related deaths with a fixed population (average population from the 1987–2000 period). (b) Similar to (a), but for heat-related deaths. (c) Similar to (a), but for cold-related deaths. (d) Time series of deaths occurring in temperatures above the 97.5th percentile. (e) Similar to (d), but for temperatures below the 2.5th percentile. From <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1029/2023GH000799>

Formatted: Font: Bold

The IPCC AR6 Working Group 2 Chapter 16.2.3.5 states how heat-related mortality is declining over time⁹

“Heat-attributable mortality fractions have declined over time in most countries owing to general improvements in health-care systems, increasing prevalence of residential air conditioning, and behavioral changes. These factors, which determine the susceptibility of the population to heat, have predominated over the influence of temperature change.”

A 2011 study of 40 major U.S. cities between 1975 and 2001, found that heat-wave mortality had decreased, in spite of rising temperatures, due to adaptation.⁴⁰ Davis et al. (2003) examined heat-related mortality in 28 U.S. cities from the 1960s to the end of the 1990s and found that heat-related mortality declined by three-quarters over the sample period. Bobb et al. (2014) examined mortality data for 106 million people in over 100 cities U.S. cities and found a 60% decline in average heat-related mortality over the period 1987–2005, from 51 per thousand deaths to 19. They furthermore found that the greatest drop was among seniors over the age of 75. In a study of

⁹ D. J. Nott et al., “Key Risks Across Sectors and Regions,” in *Climate Change 2022: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Geneva, CH: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2021), 3411–3538.

⁴⁰ Keith L. Ingman, Carolyn W. Fenner, and John W. Jones, “Climate Change Impact and Adaptation Assessment: A Guide for Coastal Resource Managers,” *Wetters, Climate, and Society*, 3, no. 4 (October 2011): 224–249.

[HYPERLINK “<https://doi.org/10.1175/WCAS-D-11-00055.1>”]

42 million deaths in 211 U.S. cities from 1962 to 2006. Nordin et al. (2015) found a more than 90 percent decline in the risk of mortality from excess heat.

Formatted: Font color: Auto

In the context of large declines in heat-related mortality, By-by reducing mortality from cold events and adapting to heat extremes, rising temperatures are associated with a net saving of lives.

The IPCC AR6 Working Group 2 Chapter 16.2.3.5 states how heat-related mortality is declining over time.¹¹

“Heat-attributable mortality fractions have declined over time in most countries owing to general improvements in health care systems, increasing prevalence of residential air conditioning, and behavioral changes. These factors, which determine the susceptibility of the population to heat, have predominated over the influence of temperature change.”

It is both disappointing and telling to see how the IPCC misrepresents the situation in its AR6 Synthesis report. Section A.2.5 of that document states: “In all regions increases in extreme heat events have resulted in human mortality and morbidity (very high confidence).” But it is silent on the larger decline of deaths during extreme cold events.

12.2 The importance of adaptation

The observed decline in US heat-related mortality has been specifically attributed to adaptation. Wang et al. (2018) exploited the spatial variability of heatwave-related mortality across 209 U.S. cities from 1962 to 2006. While simple correlation appeared to imply an increase in mortality risk during heatwaves, accounting for adaptation to heatwave intensity caused the effect to fall to near zero and become statistically insignificant. They used the results of their epidemiological model to project heat-related mortality out to 2050 under four RCP warming scenarios (including RCP8.5) with and without adaptive behavior. Assuming people continue to adapt to the heatwave risks in the regions in which they live Wang et al. project not only no increase in heat-related mortality but an overall decrease for the US as a whole. They conclude that “Ignoring adaptation would result in a substantial overestimate of future mortality related to heat waves... Accounting for adaptation, the overall heat-related mortality by 2050 would not change substantially over time compared to 2006.”

12.3

Formatted: Font: Bold

Mortality risks and energy costs

Formatted: Font: Bold, Not Italic

A 2016 study of US long term mortality risks associated with temperature variations (Barreca et al. 2016) showed that increases in mortality across the US are associated both with cold weather and hot weather. But over time, the introduction of electricity and the adoption of central heating and air conditioning (AC) dramatically reduced both risks, especially those associated with hot

¹¹ B. O'Neill et al., “Key Risks Across Sectors and Regions,” in *Climate Change 2022: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Geneva, CH: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2021), 2411–2438.

weather. Prior to 1960, a day above 90°F (32°C) added 2.2 percent to the average mortality risk rate, but after 1960 the same weather added only 0.3 percent to mortality risk, an 85 percent reduction. Prior to 1960 temperatures below 39°F (4°C) added about 1 percent to mortality risk but after 1960 the same weather only added about half that amount. Adaptation through conventional household improvements dramatically reduced public vulnerability to weather extremes. The entire reduction in hot weather mortality was attributable to widespread adoption of indoor AC, which depended on the availability of reliable and affordable electricity.

The corollary of this finding is that the use of heating and cooling systems depends on energy being affordable. Doremus et al. (2022) showed that wealthy and poor households in the US adjust their energy expenditures at similar rates in response to moderate temperature swings, but not in response to extreme temperature swings. When temperatures swing to very cold levels (< 5°C) energy spending in high-income households rises by 1.2 percent but in low-income households by only 0.5 percent. On very hot days (>30°C) electricity spending in high-income households rises by 0.5 percent but does not change at all in low-income households. The latter result is observed even in subsamples where all households have AC. The implication is that even with widespread adoption of home heating and cooling systems, inability to afford energy leaves low-income households exposed to weather extremes.

Barroca, Alan, Karen Clay, Olivier Deschenes, Michael Greenstone, and Joseph S. Shapiro, "Adapting to climate change: The remarkable decline in the US temperature mortality relationship over the twentieth century," *Journal of Political Economy*, 2016, 124 (1), 105–159.

Formatted: Font: Italic

J.M. Doremus, I. Jacqz and S. Johnston (2022), "Sweating the energy bill: Extreme weather, poor households, and the energy spending gap," *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, doi: [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeem.2022.102609>"].....

Formatted: Font: Italic

Nordio, Francesco, Antonella Zanobetti, Elena Colicino, Itai Kloog and Joel Schwartz (2015), "Changing patterns of the temperature–mortality association by time and location in the US, and implications for climate change," *Environment International*, Volume 81, pp 80–86 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2015.04.009>"].

Wang, Yan, Francesco Nordio, John Naim, Antonella Zanobetti and Joel D. Schwartz (2018) "Accounting for adaptation and intensity in projecting heat wave-related mortality" *Environmental Research* 161 pp. 464–471. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2017.11.049>"]

Bobb JF, Peng RD, Bell ML, Dominici F. (2014) Heat-related mortality and adaptation to heat in the United States. *Environmental Health Perspectives* 122:811–816. [HYPERLINK "<https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/full/10.1289/ehp.1307392>"]

Davis, Robert E., Paul C. Knappenberger, Patrick J. Michaels and Wendy M. Novicoff (2003) "Changing Heat-Related Mortality in the United States" *Environmental Health Perspectives* 111(14) November 2003 pp. 1712–1718.

Lee, Jangho and Andrew E. Dessler(2023) Future Temperature-Related Deaths in the U.S.: The Impact of Climate Change, Demographics, and Adaptation. *Geohealth* 7(8) e2023GH000799 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2023GH000799>"]

Allen, M.J., Sheridan, S.C. Mortality risks during extreme temperature events (ETEs) using a distributed lag non-linear model. (2018) *International Journal of Biometeorology* 62, 57–67 (2018). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00484-015-1117-4>"]

13 Climate change and the economy

13.1 Climate change and economic growth

13.1.1 Overview: climate is a relatively minor issue for a modern economy

It has long been noted that economies tend to do poorly in very cold and very hot regions, with the optimum somewhere in between (Nordhaus 2006). Temperature-sensitive economic activity migrates, whenever possible, to where it is best suited, and in all cases people adapt to the local climate in which they live. Based in part on these observations, in 1992 Thomas Schelling, then President of the American Economic Association, argued that whatever effects climate change would have on US economic activity they would be small relative to the many other changes that would happen.

... Manufacturing rarely depends on climate, and where temperature and humidity used to make a difference, air conditioning has intervened. When Toyota chooses among Ohio, Alabama, and Southern California for locating an automobile assembly, geographical considerations are important, but not because of climate... Finance is little affected by climate; similarly for health care, or education, or broadcasting. Transportation can be affected, but improvements in all-weather landing and take-off in the last 30 years are greater than any differences that climate makes. If the average effect is a warming, iced waterways and snow removal may decline in importance. Construction is affected, mainly by cold, and if the average effect is in the direction of warming, construction may benefit slightly.

It is really agriculture that is affected. But even if agricultural productivity declined by a third over the next half century, the per capita GNP we might have achieved by 2050 we would achieve only in 2051. ...

I conclude that in the United States, and probably Japan, Western Europe, and other developed countries, the impact on economic output will be negligible and unlikely to be noticed.

(Schelling 1992, emphasis added)

Thirty years later virtually the identical point was made by the IPCC itself in the Fifth Assessment Report:

For most economic sectors, the impact of climate change will be small relative to the impacts of other drivers. Changes in population, age, income, technology, relative prices, lifestyle, regulation, governance, and many other aspects of socioeconomic development will have an impact on the supply and demand of economic goods and services that is large relative to the impact of climate change.

(Arent et al. 2014, emphasis added)

While extreme weather events are costly, in all modern economies they are becoming steadily less and less important (Formetta and Feyen 2019). Since 1990 weather-related disaster losses have declined as a proportion of global GDP (Pielke Jr 2018, 2020) as have mortality risks (Formetta and Feyen 2019). While economic weather-related insurance payouts are rising, this is fully explained by the growth in the size of the economy and the value of the insured asset stock. Past increases in episodes extreme weather have not had a significant effect (positive or negative) on the market

value of insurance firms (Hu and McKittrick 2015). Nor have past extreme weather events had a significant effect on US banks' performance (Blickle et al. 2021).

In view of all these things economists have long been reluctant to endorse attempts to "stop" climate change or even aggressively reduce GHG emissions because the costs would not be worth it. As one critic of the economics of climate policy put it:

Mainstream climate economics takes global warming seriously, but perplexingly concludes that the optimal economic policy is to almost do nothing about it... The contrast is striking. While climate science is sending out loud-and-clear messages that fossil-fuel disinvestment must start now, letting go of coal and oil and diverting resources into renewable energy technology systems, to keep warming below the 2°C limit (IPCC 2014), mainstream climate economics claims that overly ambitious climate targets will unnecessarily hurt the economy and immediate de-carbonization is too expensive. Most climate economists thus recommend humanity to just wait-and-see.
(Storm 2017)

The mainstream economics position on the climate policy question is best represented by the findings over the past three decades from the use of Integrated Assessment Models (IAMs) of climate change policy, for which Yale economist William Nordhaus was awarded the 2018 Nobel Memorial Prize in economics. IAMs combine economic, climate, and social data into a unified framework for simulating climate damages and evaluating the optimal policy response (Resources for the Future 2025). Nordhaus' work has generally supported modest global climate policy, with aggressive measures largely deferred to later in the century. Nordhaus developed the so-called Dynamic Integrated Model of the Climate and Economy model, or DICE, in the early 1990s (Nordhaus 1993) to study the interaction between climate change, climate policy and global economic growth over long time horizons. DICE assumes global emission control can be coordinated at no cost and asks what the optimal policy target should be. The climate component of the DICE model is based on standard but very simplified climatological modeling concepts. The version of DICE at the time of Nordhaus' Nobel Prize award was described in Nordhaus (2018). His climate sensitivity parameter was 3.1°C for CO₂ doubling, the same as the best estimate in contemporary IPCC reports (3.0°C).

The baseline (no policy) scenario incurs only \$0.4T in abatement costs and leads to \$134.2T (trillion dollars) in climate damages for a total cost of \$134.6T. The climate model component of DICE projects 4.1°C warming by 2100 compared to preindustrial temperatures under this path. Note that this is a higher estimate of warming than many IPCC climate models.

The Optimal Policy scenario barely deviates from the business-as-usual path. It aims for +3.5°C warming, in other words we scale back only the lowest-value fossil fuel use and otherwise just live with almost all the warming. This suggests that most CO₂ emissions are less harmful than the policies that would be necessary to abate them. Trying to prevent warming causes costs quickly to outstrip the benefits. Pursuing a goal of capping warming at 2.5°C creates total costs of \$177.8T, which is \$43.2T worse than doing nothing at all. Nordhaus didn't evaluate trying to reach a Paris-type target of 1.5°C warming but it would be even worse.

A subsequent edition of DICE includes higher assumed damages from warming which not surprisingly leads to more aggressive policy recommendations. This will be explained in the section below on the Social Cost of Carbon.

13.1.2 Empirical analysis of climate change and economic growth

Many other studies have used econometric methods instead of IAMs to look at the potential impact of climate change on economic growth. Dell et al. (2012, herein DJO12) was an influential study that used a multi-country panel of national-level data spanning 1950 to 2005, in which they matched climate and economic data by averaging temperature from the local grid cell level up to the national level using population weights. They found that warming yields an insignificant positive effect on income growth in rich countries but a significant negative effect in poor countries. Moore and Diaz (2015) modified the DICE model to take that finding into account and concluded that it implied a dramatically higher Social Cost of Carbon due to the compounding effects of income loss over time.

A large subsequent literature has debated the robustness of the DJO12 findings. Burke et al. (2015) analyzed a global panel with temperatures averaged up to the national level and found a negative effect on growth from warming in rich and poor countries alike when the national average temperature is above 13°C. Zhao et al. (2018) used the G-Econ data set of Nordhaus (2006), which breaks economic activity down to the grid cell level, replicated DJO12-type results on the same subset of countries as used in DJO12 but then showed that on the full global sample warming increases growth in rich countries and poor countries alike, though the positive effect in the latter group is confined to where local temperatures are below about 16°C. Greßer et al. (2021) developed a regional economic data set for 1,542 sub-national regions around the world between 2005 and 2015 and found no effect of temperature on growth. Yang et al. (2023) updated the DJO12 data set and applied an estimator robust to mixed sample frequencies, finding that while temperature shocks exerted a temporary effect on income levels, they did not have a significant lasting effect on growth rates.

Newell et al. (2021) noted that there is no underlying theory to guide econometric model specification in this literature. Taking into account the arbitrary choices of which explanatory variables to include they identified over 800 possible model specifications. Using the Burke et al. (2015) data they used an estimation method that accounts for model uncertainty and found that the model form preferred by Burke et al. (2015), which implied negative effects of warming on growth even in rich countries, is explicitly excluded by the optimal model selection algorithm. Overall they could not detect a temperature effect on GDP or GDP growth, and they estimated the 95% confidence interval for the impact on global growth as of 2100 even under the exaggerated RCP8.5 warming scenario spans -86 percent to +388 percent. In other words the net effect is likely positive but too uncertain to distinguish from zero.

Barker (2023) criticized the DJO12 assumption that countries can be grouped into fixed “poor” and “rich” categories based on their incomes many decades ago. He noted that many countries were once poor but became rich over time, and if this is taken into account the original temperature effects reported by Dell et al. became small and insignificant.

Berg et al. (2023) argued that countries shouldn't be grouped into large Rich/Poor categories because they are too heterogeneous. They instead estimated country-specific temperature response coefficients then grouped countries with similar response coefficients into small panels. They separately estimated responses to global and idiosyncratic local temperature shocks to better identify the climate signal in weather data. Overall they found countries experiencing negative effects of warming on growth outnumbered those experiencing positive effects, but only temporarily: eventually the effects reverse such that about twice as many countries experience a net positive growth effect. They also found global (as opposed to local) temperature changes are much more likely to benefit growth in poor countries than rich ones. In a simulation to 2100 even using the extreme RCP8.5 scenario they computed the average global GDP loss would be only 1.9%

compared to a scenario with no warming. That is, instead of the economy growing 400% it would grow 398%. The implication of Nordhaus' analysis is that trying to prevent the warming would lead to far less than 398% growth.

To summarize, economists have long considered climate a relatively unimportant factor in economic growth, a view echoed by the IPCC itself in the Fifth Assessment Report. Mainstream climate economics has recognized that CO₂-induced warming may have some negative economic effects but they are too small to justify aggressive abatement policy, and trying to "stop" or cap global warming even at levels well above the Paris target would be worse than doing nothing. An influential study in 2012 suggested that global warming would harm growth in poor countries but it has subsequently been found not to be robust. Studies that take full account of modeling uncertainties either find no evidence of a negative effect on global growth from CO₂ emissions or find poor countries as likely to benefit from it as rich countries.

13.2 Models of the Social Cost of Carbon

The Social Cost of Carbon (SCC) is a tool for understanding the economic impact of carbon dioxide emissions, helping policymakers weigh the costs and benefits of climate policies. It estimates the damage caused by emitting one additional ton of CO₂, expressed in dollars. More formally, the SCC is the discounted present value of the current and future marginal loss of economic welfare due to an additional tonne of CO₂ entering the atmosphere. On its own the SCC is not the appropriate price to attach to CO₂ emissions for the purpose of optimal emissions control but it can be converted into an optimal tax rate by scaling it by the Marginal Cost of Public Funds (MCPF). The theory behind this was first derived by Sandmo (1975) and has been reiterated many times since then by other economists working on the topic (e.g. Parry et al. 1999). The MCPF is the cost in terms of lost private economic welfare of raising public revenue by one dollar and always exceeds unity. If a jurisdiction does not use a carbon tax, this formula still indicates the upper bound on the amount emitters should spend on abatement options at the margin along the optimal policy path. Regulations should be imposed only insofar as they do not impose marginal abatement costs in excess of the optimal tax rate.

Formatted: Subscript

13.1.2 Estimating the SCC

Although the literature refers to "estimates" of the SCC, it is not estimated in the way other economic statistics are estimated. For instance, data on market transactions including prices and quantities can be used to estimate the current inflation rate or the growth rate of per capita real Gross Domestic Product, and there are well-understood uncertainties associated with these quantities. But there are no market data available to measure many if not most of the marginal damages or benefits believed to be associated with CO₂ emissions, so these need to be imputed using economic models.

For example, an influential component of some SCC calculations is the perceived social cost associated with changed risk of future mortality due to extreme weather. There is no market in which people can directly attach a price to that risk. At best economists can try to infer such values by looking at transactions in related markets such as real estate or insurance, but isolating the component of price changes attributable to atmospheric CO₂ levels is very difficult.

Economists use IAMs to compute the SCC. Two of the best known IAMs are the Climate Framework for Uncertainty, Negotiation and Distribution ("FUND", Tol 1997) and Nordaus' DICE. IAMs embed a stylized global climate model with a very simplified representation of the global economy, including

a “damage function” or set of functions relating ambient temperature to local economic conditions. The assumptions embedded in the damage function will largely determine the resulting SCC.

One approach to developing a damage function is to begin with estimates of the costs (or benefits) of warming in specific sectors in countries around the world and aggregate up to a global amount. This was the approach used in FUND. An alternative approach is to develop a simple equation that penalizes global income according to a simple quadratic function of the average global temperature. This approach was used in DICE. In the case of the FUND model many hundreds of parameters had to be selected, whereas in DICE only three were needed and were originally chosen to assign a predetermined penalty (1.2%) to global output as of 3°C warming, with a quadratic term implying that damages grow with the square of the global average temperature anomaly. Barrage and Nordhaus (2024) recently changed the parameters to increase the penalty at 3°C to 1.6%, and added a discrete additional 1.0% GDP penalty at 3°C warming to account for “tipping points” (discrete large-scale environmental changes triggered by crossing a warming threshold) and a “judgmental adjustment” of 0.5% for excluded impacts at 3°C warming. Not surprisingly the newer version of DICE generates much higher SCC estimates than before.

The concepts of estimation and uncertainty do not readily apply to SCC calculations. By comparison, the question of whether precipitation has trended up or down along the South Carolina coast for the past hundred years can be addressed by collecting rainfall data, estimating a trend parameter and calculating statistical confidence intervals using methods with well-understood mathematical properties. In this way uncertainty can, in principle, be resolved by collecting more data and applying more accurate methods. But no amount of data collection can change the fact that many components of the SCC are unknown and rely on judgment and opinion based on knowledge of the underlying literature on the physical effects of climate change.

SCC calculations are thus best thought of as “if-then” statements: *if* the following assumptions hold, *then* the SCC is \$X per tonne. The list of ‘if’ statements includes the premise that the world’s climate and economy work according to the representation in the IAM. One way this may fail to hold is in the timing of warming. Every IAM assumes a value of the Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity (ECS), controls the amount of warming that results from CO₂ emissions and can be freely varied for the purpose of generating a distribution of SCC values associated with uncertainties over ECS. But as Roe and Baumann (2013) pointed out, time-to-equilibrium increases with the square of ECS, so an upward adjustment of the ECS parameter without an appropriate slowing down of the adjustment process can yield distorted present value damage estimates. In particular, the upper tail of warming associated with some commonly-used ECS distributions is physically impossible for even a thousand years into the future (Roe and Baumann 2013) yet in an IAM would be realized within a couple of centuries. Failure to align ECS with time-to-equilibrium will lead to an overestimate of the SCC value.

13.2.2 Variations in the SCC

Every level of the IAM calculation includes assumptions, some more influential than others. Key assumptions include the following

- The discount rate: Climate damages accrue over a long time horizon, and costs a century or two in the future need to be discounted to the present. The higher the discount rate the smaller the present value of future damages and vice versa. The discount rate represents the opportunity cost of spending money today rather than investing it and then having more to spend tomorrow. Some economists have argued for the use of very low discount

rates in SCC calculations, resulting in policy recommendations that favor relatively large immediate investments in CO₂ emission reductions. The downside is that other investments could potentially earn a larger rate of return for society.

- **Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity:** IAMs have customarily employed a value of 3.0°C or 3.1°C following the IPCC's guidance. Empirically-estimated ECS values tend to be lower than this (see Chapter XX). Dayaratna et al. (2017, 2020, 2023) have shown that use of lower empirically-derived ECS values dramatically lower the resulting SCC estimate, even when low discount rates are used.
- **Damage function coefficients:** IAMs assume CO₂ and warming cause net harms that increase exponentially with temperature. More recently, IAMs have also incorporated effects from assumed potential climate tipping points. The FUND model took limited but explicit account of CO₂ fertilization effects in agriculture. Since the coefficients were selected prior the publication of the current evidence of global greening and the magnitude of benefits to crops from elevated CO₂ (see Chapters 2 and 10) the growth effects are likely understated. The DICE model (and others) did not explicitly include any CO₂ fertilization benefit, except to the extent it was taken into account in the literature consulted when picking the damage function coefficients. The damage function in FUND contains a region in which low warming yields net benefits in many regions, a finding which is supported by econometric models of warming and growth (Berg et al. 2023) and econometric simulations of agricultural changes (McKittrick 2025). The DICE damage function, by construction, rules out net benefits at any warming level.
- **Emission scenarios:** IAMs generate SCC estimates that increase as the pre-existing concentration of CO₂ increases. Consequently the value of damages later in the century will be higher, depending on the assumed baseline emissions over the coming decades.
- **Abatement costs:** IAMs represent the cost to the economy of reducing CO₂ emissions. If CO₂ emission reductions are assumed to be inexpensive, then the model will conclude that the optimal policy should aim for deeper emission cuts and vice versa.

It is informative to ascertain whether SCC results are invariant to changes in some assumptions. But when different assumptions result in higher or lower SCC values, the change in the SCC value does not provide prima facie evidence about the validity of the assumptions. For example, in 2023 the US Environmental Protection Agency raised its preferred SCC value about 5-fold over the estimates it had issued ten years earlier. This is not because new data had been collected or better mathematical methods had been invented, but because new assumptions had been used, and the validity of those assumptions was a separate question. One was that global agricultural damages were far higher than previously assumed, based on an analysis in Moore et al. (2017). But McKittrick (2025) showed that Moore et al. (2017) had used a database in which half the CO₂ change observations were missing. When as many of those observations as possible were recovered from underlying sources and the analysis was rerun, the projected crop yield losses disappeared and turned into gains at all warming levels. Hence the portion of the EPA's SCC revision attributable to agricultural yield losses was unwarranted.

It should also be noted that the SCC is focused on the social costs of CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel use. It does not measure the private marginal benefits to consumers and society from the availability of fossil fuels. Public willingness to pay for fuels of all types indicates the value to society of reliable, abundant fossil energy. Tol (2017) estimates that the private benefit of carbon is

large relative to the social cost. This can be illustrated by noting that the price of a gallon of gas indicates the marginal value to the consumer of the fuel. Suppose we assume a relatively high Social Cost of Carbon of, say, \$75 per tonne. Deflated by a MCPF value of 1.5 that would result in a carbon tax of \$50 per tonne, which equates to about 44 cents per gallon of gas (Lavelle 2019). A pre-tax price of \$3.00 per gallon would imply the marginal social benefit of the fuel is nearly seven times the marginal social cost.

It is increasingly being argued that the SCC is too variable to be useful for policymakers. Cambridge Econometrics (Thoung 2017) stated it's "time to kill it" due to uncertainties. The UK and EU no longer use SCC for policy appraisal, opting for "target-consistent" carbon pricing (UK Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2022, Dunne 2017). However the weaknesses of the SCC concept don't mean that other regulatory measures are inherently better or more efficient. Many climate regulations (such as electric vehicle mandates, energy efficiency regulations and bans on certain types of home appliances) end up costing far more per tonne of abatement than a simple price on carbon emissions.

In summary, SCC estimates are highly uncertain due to unknowns in future economic growth, socioeconomic pathways, discount rates, climate damages, and system responses. The SCC is not intrinsically informative as to the economic or societal impacts of climate change. It provides an index connecting large networks of assumptions about the climate and the economy to a dollar value. Some assumptions yield a high SCC and others yield a low SCC. The evidence for or against the underlying assumptions needs to be established independently; the resulting SCC adds no additional information about the validity of those assumptions.

- Barrage, Lint and William Nordhaus (2024) Policies, projections, and the social cost of carbon: Results from the DICE-2023 model. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 121 (13) e2312030121 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2312030121>"]
- Berg, Kimberly, Chadwick C Curtis and Nelson Mark. (2021) GDP and temperature: Evidence on cross-country response heterogeneity. NBER Working Paper 31327 June 2023 [HYPERLINK "<http://www.nber.org/papers/w31327>"]
- Chris Thoung (2017) "Is It Time to Kill Off the Social Cost of Carbon?" Cambridge Econometrics Blog, September 14, 2017, [HYPERLINK "<https://www.camecon.com/blog/time-kill-social-cost-carbon/>"].
- Daisy Dunne (2017), "Q&A: The Social Cost of Carbon," Carbon Brief, February 14, 2017, <https://www.carbonbrief.org/qa-social-cost-carbon/>
- McKittrick, Ross R. (2025) Extended Crop Yield Meta-analysis Data do not Support Upward SCC Revision. *Scientific Reports* 15 article 5575 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-025-90254-2>"]
- Moore FC, Baldos U, Hertel T, Diaz D (2017) New science of climate change impacts on agriculture implies higher social cost of carbon. *Nature Communications* 8:1607. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-017-01792-x>
- Nordhaus, W. (1993) Optimal Greenhouse-Gas Reductions and Tax Policy in the "DICE" Model *American Economic Review* Vol. 83, No. 2, (Papers and Proceedings) pp.313-317.
- Parry, Ian, Robertson C. Williams III and Lawrence H. Goulder (1999). "When Can Carbon Abatement Policies Increase Welfare? The Fundamental Role of Distorted Factor Markets." *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management* 37: 52—84.

- Resources for the Future (2025) "Social Cost of Carbon Explorer," Resources for the Future website, accessed April 22, 2025, [HYPERLINK "<https://www.rff.org/publications/data-tools/scc-explorer/>"].
- Roe, Gerard H. and Yoram Bauman (2013) Climate Sensitivity: Should the climate tail wag the policy dog? *Climatic Change* (2013) 117:647–662 DOI 10.1007/s10584-012-0582-6
- Sandmo, Agnar (1975) "Optimal Taxation in the Presence of Externalities." *Swedish Journal of Economics* 77 (1), 86–98.
- Tol, R.S.J. (1997) On the optimal control of carbon dioxide emissions: an application of FUND *Environmental Modeling and Assessment* 2: 151–163.
- Tol, Richard S.J. (2017). "The Private Benefit of Carbon and its Social Cost," Working Paper Series 0717, Department of Economics, University of Sussex Business School. [HYPERLINK "<https://ideas.repec.org/p/sus/susewp/0717.html>"]
- UK Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (2022). "Carbon Valuation." GOV.UK, last updated April 4, 2022. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/carbon-valuation--2>"].
- US Environmental Protection Agency (2023) Supplementary Material for the Regulatory Impact Analysis for the Final Rulemaking, "Standards of Performance for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources and Emissions Guidelines for Existing Sources: Oil and Natural Gas Sector Climate Review", EPA Report on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases: Estimates Incorporating Recent Scientific Advances, November 2023, https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-12/epa_scghg_2023_report_final.pdf accessed February 28, 2024.
- Storm, S (2017) "How the Invisible Hand is Supposed to Adjust the Natural Thermostat: A Guide for the Perplexed." *Science and Engineering Ethics* vol 23: 1307—1331.
- Pielke Jr., Roger (2020) Economic 'normalisation' of disaster losses 1998–2020: a literature review and assessment," *Environmental Hazards*, 2020, pp. 1-19
- Pielke Jr., Roger (2018): Tracking progress on the economic costs of disasters under the indicators of the sustainable development goals, *Environmental Hazards*, DOI: 10.1080/17477891.2018.1540343
- Formetta, Giuseppe and Luc Feyen (2019) Empirical evidence of declining global vulnerability to climate-related hazards. *Global Environmental Change* 57 101920 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.05.004>"]
- Hu, Bin and Ross McKittrick (2015) Climatic Variations and the Market Value of Insurance Firms. *Journal of Insurance Issues* Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 92-111 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43741103>"]
- Blickle, Kristian; Sarah N. Hamerling, and Donald P. Morgan (2021) : How bad are weather disasters for banks?, Staff Reports, No. 990, Federal Reserve Bank of New York, New York, NY [HYPERLINK "<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/247913/1/sr990.pdf>"]
- Lavelle, Marianne (2019) Carbon Tax Plans: How They Compare and Why Oil Giants Support One of Them. *Inside Climate News* March 7, 2019 [HYPERLINK "<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/07032019/carbon-tax-proposals-compare-baker-shultz-exxon-conocophillips-ccl-congress/>"]



Impacts of Carbon Dioxide Emissions on the U.S. Climate

CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES

Ad hoc Climate Working Group
United States Department of Energy
May 28, 2025

DRAFT: MAY 26, 2025 11:30 AM 8:00 PM

OUO – Official Use Only – OUO – Confidential Draft – Pre-Review – Do Not Distribute

CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES

Impacts of Carbon Dioxide Emissions on the U.S. Climate

Report to US Energy Secretary Christopher Wright
May 28, 2025

Ad hoc Climate Working Group:

John Christy, Ph.D.

Judith Curry, Ph.D.

Steven Koonin, Ph.D.

Ross McKittrick, Ph.D.

Roy Spencer, Ph.D.

Copyright © 2025 United States

Suggested citation:

Ad hoc Climate Working Group (2025) Impacts of Carbon Dioxide Emissions on the U.S. Climate.
Washington DC: Department of Energy, May 24, 2025.

OUO – Official Use Only – OUO – Confidential Draft – Pre-Review – Do Not Distribute

Table of Contents

[TOC\O "1-3" \H \Z \U]

SECRETARY'S FOREWORD

Energy, Integrity, and the Power of Human Potential

Over my lifetime, I've had the privilege of working as an energy entrepreneur across a range of fields—nuclear, geothermal, natural gas, and more—and I now serve as Secretary of Energy under President Donald Trump. But above all, I'm a physical scientist who sees modern energy as nothing short of miraculous. It powers every aspect of modern life, drives every industry, and has made America an energy powerhouse with the ability to fuel global progress.

The rise of human flourishing over the past two centuries is a story worth celebrating. Yet we are told—relentlessly—that the very energy systems that enabled this progress now pose an existential threat. Hydrocarbon-based fuels, the argument goes, must be rapidly abandoned or else we risk planetary ruin.

That view demands scrutiny. That's why I commissioned this report: to encourage a more thoughtful and science-based conversation about climate change and energy. With my technical background, I've reviewed reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the U.S. government's assessments, and the academic literature. I've also engaged with many climate scientists, including the authors of this report.

What I've found is that media coverage often distorts the science. Many people—even well-meaning ones—walk away with a view of climate change that is exaggerated or incomplete. To provide clarity, I asked a diverse team of independent experts to summarize the current state of climate science, with a focus on how it relates to the United States.

I didn't select these authors because we always agree—far from it. In fact, they may not always agree with each other. But I chose them for their rigor, honesty, and willingness to elevate the debate. I exerted no control over their conclusions. What you'll read are their words, drawn from the best available data and scientific assessments.

I've reviewed the report carefully and challenged its findings. I believe it faithfully represents the state of climate science today. Still, many readers may be surprised by its conclusions—which differ in important ways from the mainstream narrative. That's a sign of how far the public conversation has drifted from the science itself.

To correct course, we need open, respectful, and informed debate. That's why I'm inviting public comment on this report. Honest scrutiny and scientific transparency should be at the heart of our policymaking.

Climate change is real, and it deserves attention. But it is not the greatest threat facing humanity. That distinction belongs to global energy poverty. As someone who values data, I know that improving the human condition depends on expanding access to reliable, affordable energy. Climate change is a challenge—not a catastrophe. But misguided policies based on fear rather than facts could truly endanger human well-being.

We stand at the threshold of a new era of energy leadership. If we empower innovation rather than restrain it, America can lead the world in providing cleaner, more abundant energy—lifting billions out of poverty, strengthening our economy, and improving our environment along the way.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reviews scientific certainties and uncertainties in how anthropogenic carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions have affected, or will affect, the Nation's climate, extreme weather events, and selected metrics of societal well-being. Those emissions are increasing the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere through a complex and variable carbon cycle, where some portion of the additional CO₂ persists in the atmosphere for centuries.

Elevated concentrations of CO₂ enhance plant growth, globally "greening" the planet and increasing agricultural productivity. They also ~~decrease ocean alkalinity~~ make the ocean less basic by an amount within the range of natural variability. That is possibly detrimental to coral reefs, although the recent rebound of the Great Barrier Reef suggests otherwise.

Formatted: Font: Bold

Carbon dioxide also acts as a greenhouse gas, exerting a warming influence on climate and weather. The world's several dozen detailed climate models offer little guidance on how the climate responds to that influence, with the average surface warming under a doubling of the CO₂ concentration ranging from 1.8°C to 5.7°C, ~~a generally higher~~ larger range than simpler, data driven estimates, which suggest 1.8 to 2.9°C

Detailed climate models generally run "hot" in their description of the climate of the past few decades - too much warming at the surface and, in the lower- and mid-troposphere, ~~and~~ too much amplification of warming aloft. They also produce too much stratospheric cooling, too much water vapor increase, too much snow loss, and too much warming in the corn belt. The combination of overly sensitive models and extreme scenarios for future emissions has exaggerated projections of future warming.

Most extreme weather events do not show long-term trends. Claims of increased frequency or intensity of hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and droughts are not supported by historical data. Additionally, forest management practices are ~~an often~~ overlooked factor in assessing wildfire activity. Global sea level has risen approximately 8 inches since 1900, but there are significant regional variations in tide gauge data driven primarily by local land subsidence; U.S. tide gauge measurements in aggregate do not show any long-term sea level acceleration.

The attribution of particular climate changes or extreme weather events to human CO₂ emissions is challenged by natural climate variability, data limitations, and inherent model deficiencies. Moreover, solar activity's contribution to the warming climate may be underestimated.

Both models and experience suggest that CO₂-induced warming may be less significant economically than commonly believed, and excessively aggressive mitigation policies could prove more detrimental than beneficial. Social Cost of Carbon estimates, which attempt to quantify the economic damage of CO₂ emissions, are highly sensitive to their underlying assumptions and so provide limited independent information.

The report supports a more nuanced and evidence-based approach to climate policy. The risks and benefits of a climate changing under both natural and human influences must be weighed against the costs, efficacy, and collateral impacts of any "climate action", considering the nation's need for reliable and affordable energy with minimal local pollution. Beyond continuing precise, un-interrupted observations of the global climate system, it will be important to make realistic assumptions about future emissions, re-evaluate climate models to address biases and uncertainties, and clearly acknowledge the limitations of event attribution studies. An approach that acknowledges both the potential risks and benefits of CO₂, rather than relying on flawed models and extreme scenarios, is essential for informed and effective decision-making. The report supports a more nuanced and evidence-based approach to climate policy. The risks and benefits of a climate changing under both natural and human influences must be weighed against the costs, efficacy, and collateral impacts of any "climate action", taking into account the nation's need for reliable

~~and affordable energy with minimal local pollution. Assumptions about future emissions should be grounded in reality. Climate models should be re-evaluated to address biases and uncertainties, and the limitations of event attribution studies should be clearly acknowledged. An approach that acknowledges both the potential risks and benefits of CO₂, rather than relying on flawed models and extreme scenarios, is essential for informed and effective decision-making.~~

~~INTRODUCTION: OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE OF THIS~~
~~DOCUMENT~~PREFACE

This document originated in late March 2025 when Secretary Wright assembled an independent group to write a report on issues in climate science relevant for energy policymaking, with particular focus on the question of whether carbon dioxide emissions endanger the US public. We agreed to undertake the work on the condition that there would be no editorial oversight by the Secretary, the Department of Energy, or any other government personnel. This condition has been honored throughout the process and the writing team has worked with full independence.

The group began working in early April with a deadline of May 28. The short timeline and the technical nature of the material meant that we could not comprehensively review all topics. While the report is intended to be accessible ~~for~~ to non-experts, we have omitted some introductory or explanatory material that can easily be accessed elsewhere. Nor have we attempted to survey entire literatures related to the topics covered. We have focused as much as possible on literature published since 2020 and referenced previous IPCC and NCA assessment reports. We have also used data through 2024 where possible.

The writing team is grateful to Secretary Wright for the opportunity to prepare this report and for his support of independent scientific assessment and open scientific debate.

May 2025

John Christy, Ph.D.

Judith Curry, Ph.D.

Steven Koonin, Ph.D.

Ross McKittrick, Ph.D.

Roy Spencer, Ph.D.

OUO – Official Use Only – OUO – Confidential Draft – Pre-Review – Do Not Distribute

**PART I: DIRECT HUMAN INFLUENCE ON ECOSYSTEMS AND THE
CLIMATE**

1 CARBON DIOXIDE AS A POLLUTANT

Chapter summary:

Carbon dioxide (CO₂) differs in many ways from the so-called Criteria Air Pollutants. It does not affect local air quality and has no human toxicological implications at ambient levels. It is an issue of concern because of its potential effects on the global climate, a complex issue that occupies much of this report.

The Clean Air Act of 1970 defined six so-called Criteria Air Contaminants subject to regulation (EPA): particulate matter, ground-level Ozone, Sulfur Dioxide, Nitrogen Dioxide, Lead and Carbon Monoxide (CO). In 2007, the Supreme Court ruled that greenhouse gases (CO₂ among them) were also “pollutants” subject to regulation under Clean Air Act (Mass. v. EPA, 2007). While the definition of “pollutant” is ultimately a legal one, there are important scientific distinctions between CO₂ and the Criteria Air Contaminants. The latter are subject to regulatory control because they cause local problems depending on concentrations that include nuisances (odor, visibility), damage to plants, and, at high enough exposure levels, toxicological effects in humans. In contrast, CO₂ is odorless, does not affect visibility and has no toxicological effects at ambient levels. It is a naturally occurring part of the atmosphere and a key component of human and plant respiration. CO₂ is essential for plant photosynthesis and higher levels are beneficial for vegetation. In these aspects, CO₂ is similar to water vapor.

Ambient outdoor air today contains about 430 parts per million (ppm) CO₂, increasing at about 2 ppm per year. The US Occupational Safety and Health Administration issues guidelines for indoor workplaces in which elevated CO₂ might be encountered, such as where dry ice is used. The Permissible Exposure Limit is 5,000 ppm over 8 hours (OSHA, 2024). Allen *et al.* (2015) reported evidence of diminished performance on some cognitive tasks among workers in office cubicles when exposed to CO₂ levels above 1,000-1,500 ppm. These levels are far larger than any plausible ambient outdoor value through the end of the 22nd century.

Formatted: Font: Italic

The growing amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere directly influences the earth system by promoting plant growth (global greening), thereby enhancing agricultural yields, and by neutralizing ocean alkalinity. But the primary concern about CO₂ is its role as a greenhouse gas (GHG) that alters the earth's energy balance. How the climate will respond to that influence is a complex question that will occupy much of this report.

References

- Massachusetts v. Environmental Protection Agency, 549 U.S. 497 (2007). [[HYPERLINK "https://www.oyez.org/cases/2006/05-1120"](https://www.oyez.org/cases/2006/05-1120)]
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (n.d.). Criteria air pollutants. [[HYPERLINK "https://www.epa.gov/criteria-air-pollutants"](https://www.epa.gov/criteria-air-pollutants)]
- U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. (2024). OSHA occupational chemical database: Carbon dioxide. [[HYPERLINK "https://www.osha.gov/chemicaldata/183"](https://www.osha.gov/chemicaldata/183)]

2 DIRECT IMPACTS OF CO₂ ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Chapter summary:

CO₂ enhances photosynthesis and improves plant water use efficiency, thereby promoting plant growth. Global greening due to increased CO₂ levels in the atmosphere is well-established on all continents.

CO₂ absorption in sea water reduces the alkalinity of the oceans. The recent decline in alkalinity is within the range of natural variability on millennial time scales. Most ocean life evolved when the oceans were mildly acidic. Declining alkalinity might adversely affect corals, although the Australian Great Barrier Reef has shown considerable growth in recent years.

2.1 CO₂ and global greening

The growing CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere has the important positive effect of promoting plant growth by enhancing photosynthesis and improving water use efficiency. That is evident in the “global greening” phenomenon discussed below, as well as in the improving agricultural yields discussed in Chapter 10.

2.1.1 Measurement of global greening

“Greening” refers to an increase in the fraction of the Earth’s surface covered by plants. It can be quantified by the “Leaf Area Index” (LAI) measured by satellite. Many studies over the past decade have confirmed a global greening pattern (increase in LAI) attributable to rising CO₂ levels. Zhu *et al.* (2016) was one of the first studies to report that global greening was detectable using satellite sensors. From 1982 to 2011 they detected greening over 25-50% of the Earth versus “browning” over only 4% and attributed 70% of the greening to rising CO₂ levels (see Figure 2.1).

Zheng (2017) confirmed the pattern, noting that greening over thirty years had added 8% to global leaf area and that greening was mitigating warming. Greening has been observed globally but Chen *et al.* (2019) noted that China and India were exploiting it through land management changes. Thus, while China accounts for only 6.6% of global vegetated area it accounts for 25% of global net increase in LAI. Piao *et al.* (2020) noted that greening was even observable in the Arctic.

While plant models predict increased in photosynthesis in response to rising CO₂, Haverd *et al.* (2020) reported a CO₂ fertilization rate nearly double what models predictions had predicted. That is, CO₂ fertilization had driven an increase in observed global photosynthesis by 30% since 1900, versus 17% predicted by plant models. This indicates that global models of the socioeconomic impacts of rising CO₂ have likely understated the benefits to crops and agriculture. The connection between CO₂ fertilization and climate policy will be discussed in Chapter 10.

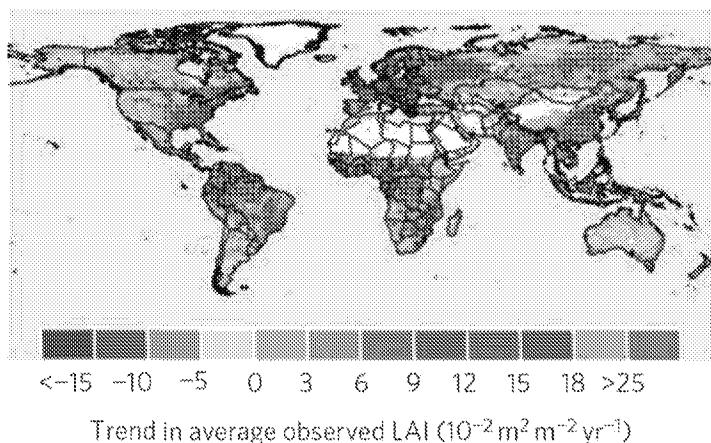


Figure 2.1: Trends in average Leaf Area Index (LAI). Source: Zhu *et al.*, 2016 Figure 3.

Finally, Chen *et al.* (2024) surveyed claims that greening had slowed since 2000 due to drought stress. They found instead that faulty satellite sensors were the cause and that the corrected data showed accelerated greening over 55% of the globe while browning was accelerating over only 7%. In other words, the greening trend continued with no evidence of slowdown, and CO_2 fertilization remained the dominant driver.

2.1.2 Photosynthesis and CO_2 levels

Plants build biomass through *photosynthesis*, a process that converts carbon dioxide, water, and light into sugar. The plant enzyme responsible for photosynthesis is called *Ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate-carboxylase/oxygenase* or “*Rubisco*”. Photosynthesis is initiated when CO_2 is available at the surface of the *RuBisCo* enzyme where it is converted to a molecule with 3 carbon atoms and thereafter incorporated into plant mass. This is referred to as the “*C3*” process.

Rubisco is estimated to have evolved about 3 billion years ago. Over geological time the Earth’s atmospheric CO_2 levels were usually many times higher than they are today, as shown in Figure 2.2.

About 400 million years ago CO_2 levels were an estimated 2,000-4,000 ppm and were at or above 1,000 ppm for much of the interval from 200 to 50 million years ago (Berner 2006, Judd *et al.* 2024). Over the past 35 million years the level of atmospheric CO_2 has been steadily declining, falling to as low as 170 ppm during glaciations (Gerhart and Ward 2010).

Over the past 35 million years the level of atmospheric CO_2 has been steadily declining. During glaciations levels have fallen as low as 170 ppm (Gerhart and Ward 2010).

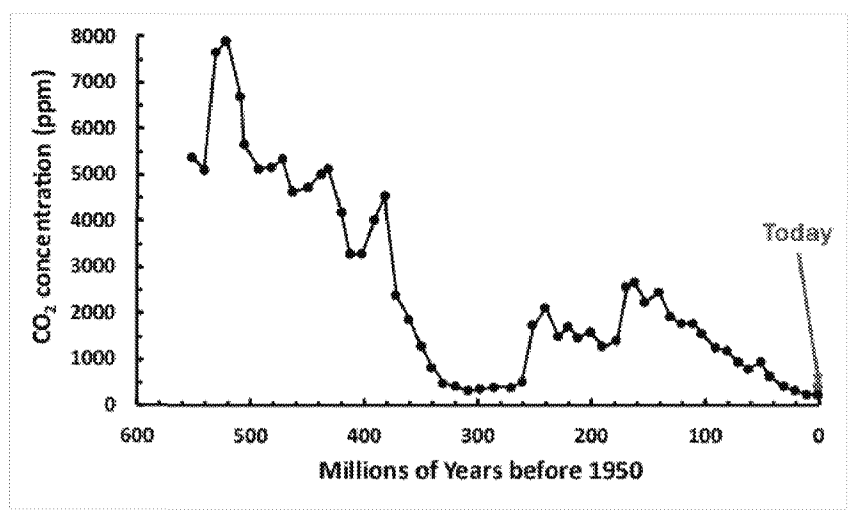


Figure 2.2. Ambient CO₂ level over the past 550 million years. Today's concentration of 430 ppm is also shown. Source: (Berner 2006)

In response to low-CO₂ conditions some plants evolved another photosynthetic pathway called C₄, in which CO₂ is concentrated in the vicinity of Rubisco, allowing for the C₃ process to function more efficiently. For agricultural purposes the plant categories are:

- C₃: rice, wheat, soybeans and most other crops
- C₄: maize (corn), sugar cane, millet, sorghum

Had atmospheric CO₂ levels continued declining, plant growth rates would have declined and eventually ceased. Below 180 ppm, the growth rates of many C₃ species are reduced 40-60% relative to 350 ppm (Gerhart and Ward 2010) and growth has stopped altogether under experimental conditions of 60–140 ppm CO₂. Some C₄ plants are still able to grow at levels even as low as 10 ppm, albeit very slowly (Gerhart and Ward 2010). Had atmospheric CO₂ levels continued declining, plant growth rates would have declined and eventually ceased. Below 180 ppm many C₃ species experience growth rate reductions on the order of 40-60% compared to their growth rates at 350 ppm (Gerhart and Ward 2010). C₃ plants have been observed under experimental conditions to stop growing altogether at levels between 60–140 ppm CO₂. Some C₄ plants are still able to grow at levels even as low as 10 ppm, albeit very slowly (Gerhart and Ward 2010).

Currently, CO₂ levels are about 420-430 ppm, up from 280 ppm in the early 1800s. The positive response of plants to extra CO₂ is illustrated in Figure 2.3, which is reproduced from Gerhart and Ward (2010). It shows the growth effect of CO₂ on Velvetleaf (*Abutilon theophrasti*) seedlings over 14 days under controlled conditions where only the CO₂ exposure is varied. The gains exhibited from induced by increasing CO₂ from 150 ppm to 350 ppm continue under a further doubling to 700 ppm.

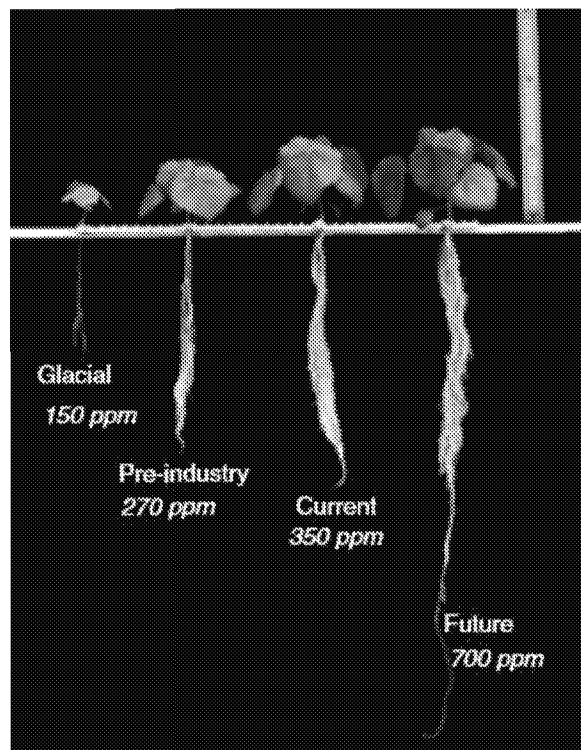


Figure 2.3: growth of *Abutilon theophrasti* after 14 days under identical conditions but for the indicated variations in CO₂ levels. Source: Gerhart and Ward (2010). Note “Current” corresponds to 1988 in image.

Over the past 60+ years there have been thousands of studies on the response of plants to rising CO₂ levels. The overwhelming theme is that plants, especially C3 plants, benefit from extra CO₂. There are two mechanisms by which CO₂ confers a growth benefit:

- Enhanced photosynthesis via the metabolic pathways described above.
- Increased water use efficiency. This arises because plants draw in CO₂ by opening the stomata (pores) on the leaf surface. When CO₂ is scarce the stomata must be kept wide open for long periods, ~~which allows~~ allowing water to evaporate away. Under enriched CO₂ conditions the stomata ~~are remain~~ remain closed for longer periods, ~~thus~~ helping the plant retain water longer, ~~thereby~~ and so increasing water use efficiency.

Specific effects of climate change on US agriculture will be reviewed in Chapter 10.

2.1.3 Rising CO₂ and crop water use efficiency

Derying et al. (2016) surveyed evidence on crop water productivity (CWP), the yield per unit of water used, drawing attention to the potential for CO₂ both to enhance photosynthesis and to reduce leaf-level

transpiration (water loss during leaf respiration). They surveyed all available FACE data (Free Air CO₂ Enrichment—see Chapter 10) on crop yield changes for Maize (corn), Wheat, Rice, and Soybean and combined it with crop model data simulating yield responses as of 2080 under the extreme RCP8.5 emissions scenario in four growing regions (Tropics, Arid, Temperate and Cold) each of which were split into rainfed and irrigated sub-regions. They reported that models without CO₂ fertilization predicted CWP losses in every region, but those were more than offset by CO₂ fertilization so that all regions showed a net CWP gain. Deryng et al (2016) also reported that negative impacts of warming on wheat and soybean yields were fully offset by CWP gains and mitigated by up to 90% for rice and 60% for maize.

Similarly, Cheng et al. (2017) noted that increased global plant growth from 1982 to 2011 due to rising CO₂ uptake was accompanied by such large gains in CWP that global water use by plants had not increased, despite the extra biomass.

Deryng et al. (2016) assumed that climate change would “exacerbate water scarcity”. Yet while models do predict that drylands will expand under climate warming, current data show the opposite: greening is happening even in arid areas. Zhang et al. (2024) report that due to increased CO₂ levels “increasing aridity in drylands won’t lead to a general loss of vegetation productivity”; at most only 4% of currently arid areas will see increased desertification. Deryng et al. (2016) surveyed evidence on crop water productivity (CWP), the yield per unit of water used, drawing attention to the potential for CO₂ both to enhance photosynthesis and reduce leaf-level transpiration (water loss during leaf respiration). They surveyed all available FACE data (Free Air CO₂ Enrichment—see Chapter 10) on crop yield changes for Maize (corn), Wheat, Rice and Soybean, and combined it with crop model data simulating yield responses as of 2080 under the extreme RCP8.5 scenario in four growing regions (Tropics, Arid, Temperate and Cold) each of which were split into rainfed and irrigated sub-regions. In every region they reported that models without CO₂ fertilization predicted CWP losses but CO₂ fertilization more than offset them so that all regions showed a net CWP gain. Deryng et al (2016) also reported that negative impacts of warming on wheat and soybean yields were fully offset by CWP gains and mitigated by up to 90% for rice and 60% for maize.

Similarly, Cheng et al. (2017) noted that increased global plant growth from 1982 to 2011 due to rising CO₂ uptake was accompanied by such large gains in CWP that despite the extra biomass global water use by plants had not increased.

Deryng et al. (2016) assumed that climate change would “exacerbate water scarcity”. It is noteworthy that while models predict drylands will expand under climate warming, current data show the opposite: greening is happening even in arid areas. Zhang et al. (2024) report that due to increased CO₂ levels “increasing aridity in drylands won’t lead to a general loss of vegetation productivity”; increased desertification will happen in at most 4% of currently arid areas.

2.1.4 CO₂ fertilization benefits in IPCC Reports

The IPCC has only minimally discussed global greening and CO₂ fertilization of agricultural crops. The topic is briefly acknowledged in a few places in the body of the IPCC 6th and earlier Assessment Reports but is omitted in all Summary documents. Section 2.3.4.3.3 of the AR6 Working Group I report, entitled “global greening and browning,” points out that the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land had concluded with *high confidence* that greening had increased globally over the past 2-3 decades. It then discusses that there are variations in the greening trend among data sets, concluding that while they have *high confidence* greening has occurred, they have *low confidence* in the magnitude of the trend. There are also brief mentions of CO₂ fertilization effects and improvements in water use efficiency in a few other chapters in the AR6 Working Groups I and II Reports.

Overall, however, the Policymaker Summaries, Technical Summaries, and Synthesis Reports paint a biased picture by failing to discuss the topic.

The IPCC has only minimally discussed global greening and CO₂ fertilization of agricultural crops. The topic is briefly acknowledged in a few places in the body of the IPCC 6th and earlier Assessment Reports but is omitted in all Summary documents. Section 2.3.4.3.3 of the AR6 Working Group I report entitled “global greening and browning” points out that the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land had concluded with *high confidence* that greening had increased globally over the past 2–3 decades. It then discusses that there are variations in the greening trend among data sets, concluding that while they have *high confidence* greening has occurred, they have *low confidence* in the magnitude of the trend. There are also brief mentions of CO₂ fertilization effects and improvements in water-use efficiency in a few other chapters in the AR6 Working Groups I and II Reports.

Overall, however, the Policymaker Summaries, Technical Summaries and Synthesis Reports fail to discuss the topic.

2.2 Ocean Alkalinity

2.2.1 Changing pH

A neutral aqueous solution has a pH of 7.0, while one with pH greater than 7.0 is basic (also termed alkaline) and with pH less than 7.0 is acidic. The modern-day global average pH of sea water is estimated to be 8.04 (Copernicus Marine Service 2025), down from an estimated value of 8.2 in pre-Industrial times (Gattuso and Hanson, 2011). As CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere increase, the oceans absorbed more, which decreases their alkalinity. Depending upon the oceans’ buffering capacity, they are expected to become somewhat less alkaline over time, consistent with the observed decrease in pH.

The modern-day global average pH of sea water is estimated to be 8.04 (Copernicus Marine Service 2025), down from an estimated value of 8.2 in pre-Industrial times (Gattuso and Hanson, 2011). As CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere increase, more is absorbed by the oceans, which decreases alkalinity. Depending upon the buffering capacity of the oceans, the oceans are expected to become somewhat less alkaline over time, consistent with the observed decrease in pH.

Formatted: Justified, Space After: 6 pt

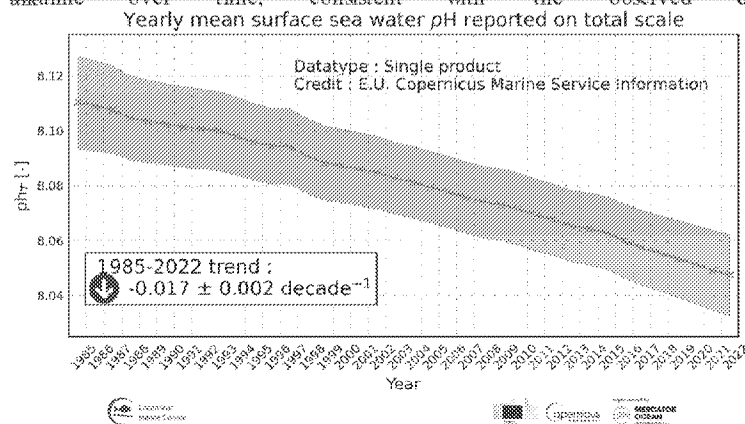


Figure 2.4: Ocean pH 1985 – 2022. Source: Copernicus Marine Service 2025

While this process is often called “ocean acidification”, it is a misnomer because the oceans are not expected to become acidic; “ocean neutralization” would be more accurate. Even if the water were to turn acidic, it is believed that life in the oceans evolved when the oceans were mildly acidic with pH 6.5 - to 7.0 (Krisansen-Totton et al., 2018). On the time scale of thousands of years, boron isotope proxy measurements show that ocean pH was around 7.4 or 7.5 during the last glaciation (up to about 20,000 years ago) increasing to present-day values as the world warmed during deglaciation (Rae et al., 2018). Thus, ocean biota appear to be quite resilient to natural long-term changes in ocean pH since marine organisms are exposed to wide ranges in pH naturally.

Formatted: Highlight

While this process is often called “ocean acidification”, it is a misnomer because the oceans are not expected to become acidic; “ocean neutralization” would be more accurate. Even if the water were to turn acidic, it is believed that life in the oceans evolved when the oceans were mildly acidic with pH 6.5 - to 7.0 (Krisansen-Totton et al., 2018). On the time scale of thousands of years, boron isotope proxy measurements of pH show that ocean pH was around 7.4 or 7.5 during the last glaciation (up to about 20,000 years ago) increasing to present day values as the world warmed during deglaciation (Rae et al., 2018). Thus, there appears to be considerable resilience of ocean biota to natural long-term changes in ocean pH since marine organisms are exposed to wide ranges in pH anyway.

2.2.2 Coral reef changes

There are concerns that a decreasing pH of sea water will reduce the calcification rate of coral reefs. But coral reefs already endure large swings in pH, partly due to daily photosynthetic activity in the reef; measured pH values range from 9.4 during the day to 7.5 at night (Revelle and Fairbridge, 1957). De'ath et al. (2009) reported that a portion of Australia's Great Barrier Reef (GBR, the world's largest coral reef ecosystem) had experienced a 14% decline in calcification since 1990. This was tentatively attributed to increasing water temperature and decreasing pH. But Ridd et al. (2013) showed that report to have resulted from a biased data analysis which, when corrected, showed no change in calcification rates. Nevertheless, the alarm produced by the original paper has persisted as evidenced by the large number of published citations (541) received by the original study compared to only 11 citations for the correction (as of 30 April 2025).

The most recent annual summary of GBR conditions from the Australian Institute of Marine Science indicates that coral production has rebounded strongly (AIMS, 2023). Figure 2.5 shows the results of the AIMS surveys of hard coral cover, expressed as a percentage of the reef area. Much of the decline in the GBR before 2011 turned out to be due to intense tropical cyclone activity (Beeden et al., 2015) as well as a string of marine heatwaves, agricultural runoff and invasive species (Woods Hole, 2023). Given the reported declines in GBR calcification between 1990 and 2009 and the continued increase in atmospheric CO₂ levels the rebound has surprised some observers. The most recent annual summary of GBR conditions from the Australian Institute of Marine Science indicates a strong rebound has occurred in coral production (AIMS, 2023). Figure 2.5 shows the results of the AIMS surveys of hard coral cover, expressed as a percentage of the reef area. Much of the decline in the GBR before 2011 turned out to be due to intense tropical cyclone activity (Beeden et al., 2015) as well as a string of marine heatwaves, agricultural runoff and invasive species (Woods Hole, 2023). Given the reported declines in GBR calcification between 1990 and 2009 and the continued increase in atmospheric CO₂ levels the rebound has come as a surprise to some observers.

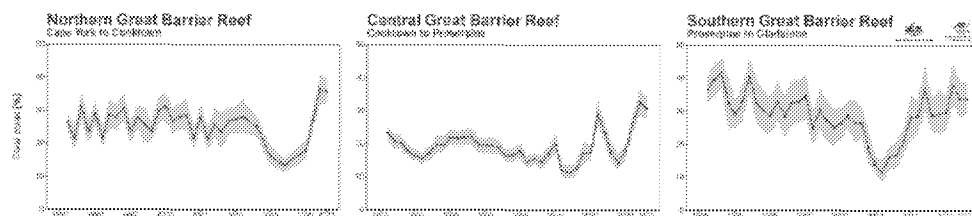


Figure 2.5 Hard coral cover of three regions of the Great Barrier Reef 1985 to 2023. Source: AIMS 2023.

It is being increasingly recognized that publication bias (alarming ocean acidification results preferred by high-impact research publications) exaggerates the impacts of declining ocean pH. An ICES Journal of Marine Science Special Issue addressed this problem with an article entitled, *Towards a Broader Perspective on Ocean Acidification Research*. In the Introduction to that Special Issue, H. I. Browman stated, “As is true across all of science, studies that report no effect of ocean acidification are typically more difficult to publish.” (Browman, 2016).

Similarly, a meta-analysis (Clements *et al.*, 2021) of the negative effects of ocean acidification on reef fish behavior found what they called a “decline effect”: initially dramatic conclusions published in prominent journals showing apparently large reported effects of acidification tended to be followed up by subsequent studies on larger sample sizes yielding much smaller and typically non-existent effects. They call for their colleagues to improve research practices to prevent counter the “decline effect” from persisting.

[The] vast majority of studies with large effect sizes in this field tend to be characterized by low sample sizes, yet are published in high-impact journals and have a disproportionate influence on the field in terms of citations. We contend that ocean acidification has a negligible direct impact on fish behavior, and we advocate for improved approaches to minimize the potential for a decline effect in future avenues of research (Clements *et al.*, 2021).

In summary, ocean life is complex and much of it evolved when the oceans were acidic relative to the present. The ancestors of modern coral first appeared about 245 million ago; as can be seen from Figure 2.2, CO₂ levels for more than 200 million years afterward were many times higher than they are today. Much of the public discussion of the effects of ocean “acidification” on marine biota has been one-sided and exaggerated. There is a known tendency for studies reporting dramatic effects on things like coral cover and fish behavior to get published in high-impact journals and receive widespread press coverage, then subsequent research rebutting those findings receives little attention.

References

- AR6: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report (2021) Working Group I Contribution. [HYPERLINK "<http://www.ipcc.ch>"].
 Australian Institute of Marine Science. (2022). Continued coral recovery leads to 36-year highs across two-thirds of the Great Barrier Reef. [HYPERLINK

- "https://www.aims.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/AIMS_LTMP_Report_on%20GBR_coral_status_2021_2022_040822F3.pdf"]
- Beeden, R., Maynard, J., Puotinen, M., Marshall, P., Dryden, J., Goldberg, J., & Williams, G. (2015). Impacts and recovery from Severe Tropical Cyclone Yasi on the Great Barrier Reef. *PLOS ONE*, 10, e0121272. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0121272>"]
- Berner, R. A. (2006). GEOCARBSULF: A combined model for Phanerozoic atmospheric O₂ and CO₂. *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta*, 70, 5653–5664.
- Browman, H. I. (2016). Applying organized scepticism to ocean acidification research. *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, 73(3), 529.1–536. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsw010>"]
- Chen, C., Park, T., Wang, X., Piao, S., Xu, B., Chaturvedi, R. K., ... & Myneni, R. B. (2019). China and India lead in greening of the world through land-use management. *Nature Sustainability*, 2, 122–129. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-019-0220-7>"]
- Chen, X., Wang, Y., Liu, Y., & Piao, S. (2024). The global greening continues despite increased drought stress since 2000. *Global Ecology and Conservation*, 49, e02791. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2351989423004262>"]
- Cheng, L., Zhang, L., Wang, Y. P., ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2017). Recent increases in terrestrial carbon uptake at little cost to the water cycle. *Nature Communications*, 8, 110. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-017-00114-5>"]
- Clements, J. C., Sundin, J., Clark, T. D., & Jutfelt, F. (2022). Meta-analysis reveals an extreme “decline effect” in the impacts of ocean acidification on fish behavior. *PLOS Biology*, 20(2), e3001511. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3001511>"]
- Copernicus Marine Service. (2025). Global ocean acidification – Mean sea water pH time series and trend from multi-observations reprocessing. [HYPERLINK "https://data.marine.copernicus.eu/product/GLOBAL_OMI_HEALTH_carbon_ph_area_averaged/description"]
- De'ath, G., Lough, J., & Fabricius, K. (2009). Declining coral calcification on the Great Barrier Reef. *Science*, 323, 116–119. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1165283>"]
- Deryng, D., Conway, D., Ramankutty, N., Price, J., Warren, R., Jones, R., ... & Elliott, J. (2016). Regional disparities in the beneficial effects of rising CO₂ concentrations on crop water productivity. *Nature Climate Change*. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2995>"]
- Gattuso, J. P., & Hansson, L. (Eds.). (2011). *Ocean acidification: Background and history*. Oxford University Press.
- Gerhart, L. M., & Ward, J. K. (2010). Plant responses to low[CO₂] of the past. *New Phytologist*, 188, 674–695. [HYPERLINK "<https://nph.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1469-8137.2010.03441.x>"]
- Haverd, V., Raupach, M., Briggs, P., ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2020). Higher than expected CO₂ fertilization inferred from leaf to global observations. *Global Change Biology*, 26, 2390–2402.
- Hu, S. W. (2021). Response of rice yield traits to elevated atmospheric CO₂ concentration and its interaction with cultivar, nitrogen application rate and temperature: A meta-analysis of 20 years FACE studies. *Science of the Total Environment*, 764, 142797.
- Judd, E. J., Scotese, C. R., Young, S. A., ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2024). A 485-million-year history of Earth's surface temperature. *Science*, 385(6715). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adk3705>"]
- Krissansen-Totton, J., Arney, G. N., & Catling, D. C. (2018). Constraining the climate and ocean pH of the early Earth with a geological carbon cycle model. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(6), 4105–4110. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1721296115>"]
- Piao, S., Wang, X., Park, T., ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2020). Characteristics, drivers and feedbacks of global greening. *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment*, 1, 14–27.
- Rae, J. W. B., Burke, A., Robinson, L. F., ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2018). CO₂ storage and release in the deep Southern Ocean on millennial to centennial timescales. *Nature*, 562, 569–573. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-018-0614-0>"]

- Revelle, R., & Fairbridge, R. W. (1957). Carbonate and carbon dioxide. In J. W. Hedgpeth (Ed.), Treatise on marine ecology and paleoecology (Vol. 1). *Geological Society of America*.
- Ridd, P., Silva, E., & Stieglitz, T. (2013). Have coral calcification rates slowed in the last twenty years? *Marine Geology*, 346, 392–399. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.margeo.2013.09.002>"]
- Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. (2023). Is the Great Barrier Reef making a comeback? [HYPERLINK "<https://www.whoi.edu/oceanus/feature/is-the-great-barrier-reef-making-a-comeback/>"]
- Zhang, Y., Liu, Y., Chen, X., ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2024). Less than 4% of dryland areas are projected to desertify despite increased aridity under climate change. *Nature Communications Earth & Environment*, 5. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01463-y>"]
- Zhu, Z., Piao, S., Myneni, R. B., ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2016). Greening of the Earth and its drivers. *Nature Climate Change*, 6, 791–795. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/nclimate3004>"]

3 HUMAN INFLUENCES ON THE CLIMATE

Chapter Summary:

The global climate is naturally variable on all time scales. Anthropogenic CO₂ emissions add to that variability by changing the total radiative balance in the atmosphere.

The IPCC has downplayed the role of the sun in climate change but there are plausible solar irradiance reconstructions that imply it contributed to recent warming.

Climate projections are based on IPCC emission scenarios that have tended to exceed observed trends. The vast majority of Most academic climate “impacts” studies in recent years are based upon the extreme 8.5 scenario that is now considered implausible; its use as a business-as-usual scenario has been misleading.

Carbon cycle models connect annual emissions to growth in the atmospheric CO₂ stock. While Models models disagree over the rate of land and ocean CO₂ uptake but all agree that it has been increasing since 1959.

3.1 Components of radiative forcing and their history

3.1.1 Historical radiative forcing

A changing climate has been the norm throughout the Earth’s 4.6-billion-year history. The Earth’s temperature and weather patterns change naturally over timescales ranging from decades to millions of years. Natural variations in the surface climate originate in two ways. Internal climate fluctuations associated with circulations in the atmosphere and ocean produce exchanges of exchange energy, water, and carbon between the atmosphere, oceans, land, and ice. External influences on the climate system include variations in the energy received from the sun and the effects of volcanic eruptions. Human activities influence climate through changing land use and land cover. Humans are also changing the composition of the atmosphere by emissions of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases and by altering the concentration of aerosol particles in the atmosphere.

The earth is warmed by the sunlight it absorbs and is cooled by the radiative heat it emits radiates to space. Averaged over the Earth’s surface, each of these processes involve power flows of about 240 Watts per square meter (W/m²). When they are in balance, there are no net external causes of warming or cooling. Both human and natural influences on the climate alter this balance and so cause the climate to change.

Influences on the Earth’s energy balance at the top of the atmosphere are quantified by “radiative forcing”, the extent to which they disturb the warming/cooling balance; a positive forcing warms while a negative forcing cools. The IPCC’s estimated history of major components of radiative forcing since 1750 is shown in the following two figures from its AR6.

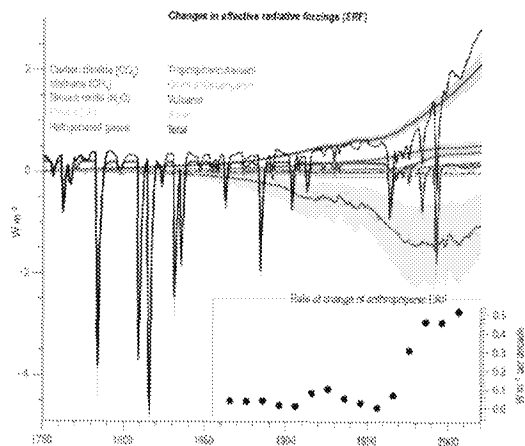


Figure 3.1.1: IPCC estimates of radiative forcing components over time. Source: [[HYPERLINK "https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/figures/chapter-2/figure-2-10/"](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/figures/chapter-2/figure-2-10/)]

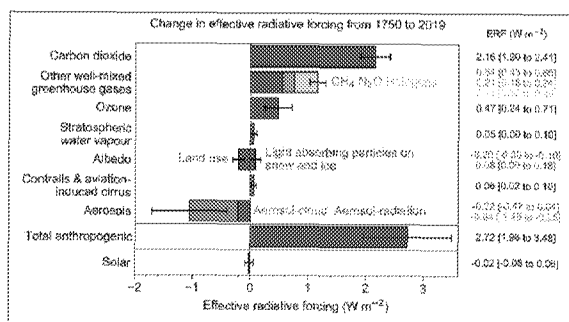


Figure 3.1.2 IPCC estimates of radiative forcing component changes from 1750 to 2019. Source: [[HYPERLINK "https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/figures/chapter-7/figure-7-6/"](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/figures/chapter-7/figure-7-6/)]

These graphs show that the total radiative forcing is comprised of both natural and anthropogenic components. Carbon dioxide is the largest human influence on the climate and the one most relevant to the influence of energy systems. It exerts a warming influence by decreasing the cooling power of the atmosphere. Emissions of CO_2 are accumulating in the atmosphere, as described in the following section, so that the warming influence is growing. Other greenhouse gases (methane, nitrous oxide, halogens, and ozone) act similarly, currently adding another 75% to CO_2 's warming. Aerosols exert a cooling effect, although with large uncertainties. Emissions of CO_2 are accumulating in the atmosphere, as described in the following section, so that the warming influence is increasing. Other greenhouse gases (methane, nitrous oxide, halogens, and ozone) act similarly, currently adding another 75% to CO_2 's warming. Aerosols exert a cooling effect, although with large uncertainties in the way they catalyze the formation of reflective

clouds. As a result, understanding the causes of recent warming requires not just identifying the warming effects of CO₂, but also the more uncertain cooling effects of aerosols.

The IPCC views the change in the radiative forcing by the sun to be negligible, based on their preference for reconstructions that imply minimal solar change since preindustrial times. But Connolly *et al.* (2021) reviewed sixteen different Total Solar Irradiance (TSI) reconstructions in the literature covering the years 1600-2000; the reconstructions vary from almost no change in TSI to a relatively large upward trend. Those authors note that the variation in TSI reconstructions combined with variations in surface temperature reconstructions allows for inferences consistent with either no or most 20th Century warming being attributable to the sun. The IPCC views the change in the radiative forcing by the sun to be negligible, based on their preference for reconstructions that imply minimal solar change since preindustrial times. Connolly *et al.* (2021) reviewed sixteen different Total Solar Irradiance (TSI) reconstructions in the literature covering the 1600-2000 interval; they vary from almost no change in TSI to a relatively large upward trend. Those authors note that the variation in TSI reconstructions combined with variations in surface temperature reconstructions allows for inferences consistent with either no or most 20th Century warming being attributable to the sun.

A particularly thorny issue is the gap in TSI data between 1989 and 1991 due to a delay in the launch of a monitor following the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster on January 28 1986. This delay prevented a replacement satellite from being launched in time to overlap with, and its readings to be intercalibrated with, the prior system (Zacharias 2014, Scafetta *et al.* 2019). This is called the ACRIM (Active Cavity Radiometer Irradiance Monitor) gap problem. The question of whether there is an upward trend in TSI over 1978 to 2018 comes down to hangs on how the ACRIM data gap is filled. Connolly *et al.* (2021) found that the IPCC's consensus statements on solar forcing were prematurely formulated through the suppression of dissenting scientific opinions.

The other natural radiative forcing component is largely volcanic aerosols, which exert an episodic cooling influence. Box 4.1 in the IPCC AR6 Report addresses the climate impact of volcanic eruptions, noting three explosive volcanic eruptions that occurred in the first half of the 19th century. This included the 1815 Tambora eruption that resulted in the 'year without summer', with multiple harvest failures across the Northern Hemisphere. There is uncertainty about the sign of the relatively small forcing due to the submarine volcano Hunga Tonga which erupted in 2022 (Jenkins *et al.* 2023, Schoeberl *et al.* 2024).

Figure 3.1.1 shows that the anthropogenic forcing component was negligible before about 1900 and has increased steadily since, rising to almost 3 W/m² today. However, this is still only about 1 percent of the unperturbed radiation flows, making it a challenge to isolate the effects of anthropogenic forcing; state-of-the-art satellite estimates of global radiative energy flows are only accurate to a few W/m². Natural sources of global energy imbalance other than volcanoes and total solar irradiance (TSI) are not included in these graphs because they remain largely unknown.

3.1.2 Change in atmospheric CO₂ since 1958

Carbon dioxide's warming influence depends on how much "extra" CO₂ accumulates in the atmosphere - i.e., its concentration above the preindustrial value of 280 ppm. The CO₂ level as recorded at the Mauna Loa observatory in Hawaii, generally used as the representative global average concentration, is available online at [HYPERLINK "<https://gml.noaa.gov/ccgg/trends/index.html>"]. The concentration was about 316 ppm at the start of the record in 1959 and is now about 430 ppm, a 36 percent increase. At the end of the last glaciation CO₂ levels had fallen to about 180 ppm. As discussed in Chapter 2, C3 plants begin dying at CO₂ levels below about 140 ppm and C4 plants at levels below 100 ppm, so if CO₂ levels had continued falling plant life would have been imperiled.

Carbon dioxide's warming influence depends upon how much "extra" CO₂ accumulates in the atmosphere - i.e., its concentration above the preindustrial value of 280 ppm. The CO₂ level as recorded at

the Mauna Loa observatory in Hawaii is generally used as the representative global average concentration. The data are available online at [HYPERLINK "<https://gml.noaa.gov/ccgg/trends/index.html>"]. The concentration was about 316 ppm at the start of the record in 1959 and is now about 430 ppm, a 36 percent increase. At the end of the last glaciation CO₂ levels had fallen to about 180 ppm. As discussed in Chapter 2 C3 plants begin dying at CO₂ levels below about 140 ppm and C4 plants at CO₂ levels below 100 ppm, so if CO₂ levels had continued falling plant life might have been in peril.

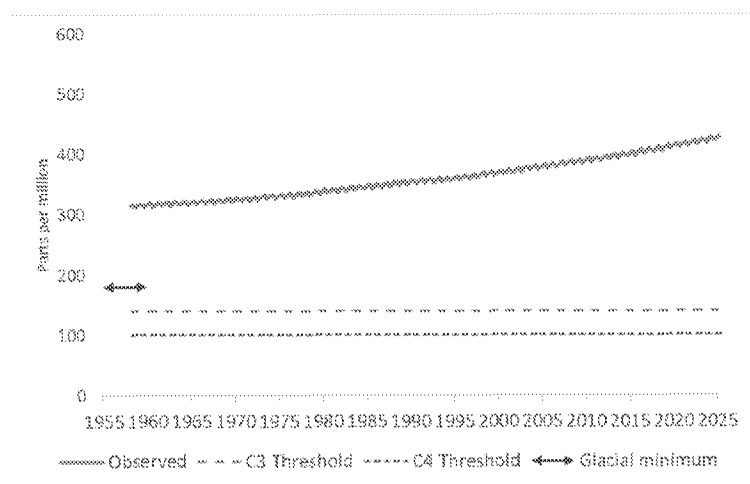


Fig. 3.1.3. CO₂: Yearly average atmospheric CO₂ concentrations (1959-2025) in ppm measured at Mauna Loa (blue). C3 Threshold: Level below which C3 plants begin dying (140 ppm, see Chapter 2). C4 Threshold: Level below which C4 plants begin dying (100 ppm, see Chapter 2). Glacial minimum: Minimum level during recent glaciations (purple arrow). CO₂ data source: [HYPERLINK "<https://gml.noaa.gov/ccgg/trends/index.html>"]

The annual increase in concentration is only about half of the CO₂ emitted because land and ocean processes currently absorb “excess” CO₂ at a rate approximately 50% of the human emissions. Future concentrations, and hence future human influences on the climate, therefore depend upon two components: (1) future rates of global human CO₂ emissions, and (2) how fast the land and ocean remove extra CO₂ from the atmosphere. We discuss each of these in turn.

3.2 Urbanization influence on temperature trends

Historical temperature data over land has been collected mainly where people live. This raises the problem of how to filter out non-climatic warming signals due to Urban Heat Islands (UHI) and other changes to the land surface. If they are not removed the data may over-attribute observed warming to greenhouse gases. The IPCC acknowledges that raw temperature data are contaminated with UHI effects but claims to have data cleaning procedures that remove them. It is an open question whether those procedures suffice for the purpose are sufficient.

AR6 downplayed the issue by saying (WGI p. 235) that no recent evidence had emerged to alter the AR5 finding that urbanization causes an upward bias of no more than 10% in the global land surface warming trend. AR5 (WGI p. 189) also cited the 10% upper bound without citing a source. AR4 (WGI p. 244) cited Jones *et al.* (1990) and Peterson *et al.* (1999) as the basis of the claim. Peterson *et al.* had failed to find any difference in trends between rural and urban samples, although their definition of rural included local populations up to 10,000 persons and while the relative influence of urbanization begins well below that (Spencer *et al.*, 2025). Jones *et al.* compared rural/urban warming in three regions: Eastern Australia, Eastern China and Western Soviet Union. Their definition of “rural” included towns of up to 10,000 in the former Soviet Union and up to 100,000 in China. They found relative warming biases greater than 10% in these areas but conjectured that the urbanization effect averaged over the areas they did not examine would bring the global land bias to under 10% of the observed warming trend.

Several papers appeared in print prior to the IPCC AR4 that argued that the warming effect of UHIs added a relatively large (30-50%) component to observed warming and was not simulated by climate models (de Laat and Maurellis 2006, McKittrick and Michaels 2007). These findings were based on correlations between locations of maximum warming over land with locations of maximum socioeconomic development. AR4 asserted (p. 244) that these correlations were an artefact of natural atmospheric circulations and were in fact statistically insignificant, and on that basis set the findings aside. Their claim was controversial because it was presented with no supporting evidence. Prior to the IPCC AR4 several papers appeared in print arguing that the warming effect of UHIs added a relatively large (30-50%) component to observed warming and was not simulated by climate models (de Laat and Maurellis 2006, McKittrick and Michaels 2007). These findings were based on correlations between locations of maximum warming over land with locations of maximum socioeconomic development. AR4 asserted (p. 244) that these correlations were an artefact of natural atmospheric circulations and were in fact statistically insignificant, and on that basis set the findings aside. The claim attracted controversy because it was presented with no supporting evidence. McKittrick (2010) and McKittrick and Nierenberg (2010) showed that taking into account various conjectured alternative explanations for the correlations did not affect their significance. The AR5 (p. 189) conceded that the AR4 had provided “no explicit evidence” for its assessment and further acknowledged, based on these papers, that there was “significant evidence for such contamination of the record” i.e. a warming bias in the land record. However as already noted, elsewhere in the AR5 report they carried forward the AR4 claim that it was less than 10% of observed warming. Further they provided no caution about using the land record for climate measurement despite conceding the evidence for UHI contamination, and they expressed no caution against using the land record for climate measurement on the assumption that it is not contaminated with UHI bias. Recently Soon *et al.* (2023) estimated an urbanization bias in the Northern Hemisphere land record over 1850-2018 sufficient to increase the trend in the blended record from 0.55°C to 0.89°C per century.

Commented [SK1]: Still a bit ponderous - needs further simplification, I think

Some studies providing evidence against UHI contamination compared warming rates between rural and urban locations (Jones *et al.* 1990, Peterson *et al.* 1999, Wickham *et al.* 2013). It is not known whether such methods would be capable of detecting UHI bias even when present. The influence of UHI warming is logarithmic, in other words it is strongest at low population growth levels then tapers off as local urbanization expands (Oke 1973, Spencer *et al.* 2025). Hence finding the same or more warming a greater warming trend in rural areas than compared to nearby urban areas is consistent either with UHI bias being absent or present does not prove the absence of UHI contamination. McKittrick (2013) provided an empirical demonstration in which the rural/urban trends were not significantly different in a data set shown on other grounds to be contaminated with UHI bias.

Formatted: Highlight

Formatted: Highlight

Formatted: Highlight

Parker (2006) instead examined a sample of urban locations and found no difference in trends between subsets partitioned according to nighttime wind speed, concluding on this basis that urbanization could not be a significant factor. Here again the question is whether such a method would find UHI bias even if present. McKittrick (2013) presented an example in which UHI-contaminated data did not exhibit significant trend differences when stratified according to wind speed.

The challenge in measuring UHI bias is relating local temperature change to a corresponding change in population or urbanization, rather than to a static classification variable such as rural or urban. Spencer et al. (2025) used newly available historical population archives to undertake such an analyses and found evidence of significant UHI bias in U.S. summertime temperature data.

In summary, while there is clearly warming in the land record, there is also evidence that it is biased upward by patterns of urbanization and that these biases have not been completely removed by the data processing algorithms used to produce climate data sets. The challenge in measuring UHI bias is relating local temperature change to a corresponding change in population or urbanization, rather than to a static classification variable such as rural or urban. Spencer et al. (2025) use newly available historical population archives to undertake such an analyses and found evidence of significant UHI bias in US summertime temperature data.

In summary while there is clearly warming in the land record, there is also evidence that it is biased upward by patterns of urbanization and that these biases are not removed by the data processing algorithms used to produce climate data sets.

3.3 Future emission scenarios and the carbon cycle

3.3.1 Emission scenarios

Assessing the dangers of future GHG emissions requires assumptions about what those emissions will be. Future emissions, and hence human influences on the climate, will depend upon future demographics, economic activity, regulation, and energy and agricultural technologies. Various assumptions about each of those lead to projections of greenhouse gas emissions and concentrations, aerosol concentrations, and changes in land use, which ultimately can be combined into assumptions about anthropogenic radiative forcing.

The great uncertainties about these many factors make it impossible to precisely predict future emissions. Instead, the IPCC has created various sets of scenarios meant to span a plausible range of possibilities for population, economy, and technologies. Recent versions of the scenarios are labeled by a number indicating the anthropogenic radiative forcing expected in 2100 under that scenario. Thus a scenario labeled with a “6” corresponds to 6 W/m² of human-induced radiative forcing (warming) at the end of the century. (Recall current anthropogenic radiative forcing is about 2.7 W/m².)

Although the IPCC does not claim its emission scenarios are forecasts, they are often treated as such. Comparisons of past scenario groups against observations show that IPCC emission projections tend to overstate actual subsequent emissions. For the IPCC Third and Fourth Assessment Reports a set of emission projections from the *Special Report on Emission Scenarios* was used; these were referred to as the SREP scenarios. McKittrick *et al.* (2012) showed that, when converted to per capita values, the SREP scenario emissions distribution was skewed upwards and incompatible with observed trends. McKittrick and Wood (2013) further showed that global energy market dynamics constrained global per capita CO₂ emissions to an extent not reflected in IPCC scenarios. The bias of the SRES scenarios was confirmed by the later analysis of Hausfather *et al.* (2019) who showed that observed atmospheric CO₂ concentrations tracked the low end of the SRES range and also of subsequent IPCC scenario ranges. Because of the great uncertainties about these many factors in the decades to come, Assessing the dangers of future GHG emissions requires assumptions about what those emissions will be. Future emissions, and hence human influences on the climate, will depend upon future demographics, economic activity, regulation, and energy and agricultural technologies. Various assumptions about each of these lead to projections of greenhouse gas emissions and concentrations, aerosol concentrations, and changes in land use, which ultimately can be combined into assumptions about anthropogenic radiative forcing.

Formatted: English (Canada)

Instead of making precise predictions of future concentrations, the IPCC has created various sets of scenarios meant to span a plausible range of possibilities for population, economy, and technologies. Recent versions of the scenarios are labeled by a number indicating the anthropogenic radiative forcing expected in 2100 under that scenario. Thus, a scenario labeled with a “6” corresponds to 6 W/m² of human-induced radiative forcing (warming) at the end of the century. (Recall current anthropogenic radiative forcing is about 2.7 W/m².)

Although the IPCC does not claim its emission scenarios are forecasts, they are often treated as such. Comparisons of past scenario groups against observations show a tendency for IPCC emission projections to overstate actual subsequent emissions. For the IPCC Third and Fourth Assessment Reports a set of emission projections from the *Special Report on Emission Scenarios* was used; these were referred to as the SRES scenarios. McKittrick *et al.* (2012) showed that, when converted to per capita values, the SRES scenario emissions distribution was skewed upwards and incompatible with observed trends. McKittrick and Wood (2013) further showed that global energy market dynamics constrained global per capita CO₂ emissions to an extent not reflected in IPCC scenarios. The bias of the SRES scenarios was confirmed by the later analysis of Hausfather *et al.* (2019) who showed (Figure 3.3.1) that observed atmospheric CO₂ concentrations tracked the low end of the SRES range and also of subsequent IPCC scenario ranges.

For AR5 the IPCC developed a new set of scenarios called the Representative Concentration Pathways (RCPs). These were identified by a number representing the increase in forcing and were thus called RCP2.6, RCP4.5, RCP6.0 and RCP8.5. RCP2.6 (implying an anthropogenic radiative forcing in 2100 of 2.6 W/m²) projects describes a GHG concentration pathway leading to warming well below 2°C. At the other end of the scale RCP8.5 is an extreme outcome implying nearly 5°C warming just in this century from 1900 to 2100.

RCP8.5 came to be referred to as the no-policy baseline, or “business-as-usual” scenario in both the academic literature and popular media. It was therefore used to generate the reference outcome supposedly representing the 21st century world in the absence of increasingly stringent emission reduction policies. But RCP8.5 was intended as a low-probability high emissions scenario and its use as a business-as-usual baseline has been criticized as grossly misleading.¹ Hausfather and Peters (2020) writing in a commentary in *Nature* magazine, pointed out that RCP8.5 was developed as an extreme worst-case, and its misuse as a “business as usual” baseline has resulted in a large number of misleading studies and media reporting.

The implausibility of the RCP8.5 scenario was examined by Burgess *et al.* (2021). They noted that RCP8.5 has already diverged from observed trends in energy use and the near future trends diverge sharply from those of the International Energy Agency (IEA), which provides market-based projections of energy use for the coming decades. The IEA trends, which are based on plausible extrapolations of current economic and demographic trends, run below the entire envelope of RCP projections, implying not only that RCP8.5 is dubious, but that even lower emission scenarios are looking unlikely.

Widespread use of RCP8.5 has created an alarmist bias in the climate impacts literature. The extent of this problem was confirmed in a literature analysis by Pielke Jr. and Ritchie (2020). They found that some 16,800 scientific papers published between 2010 and 2020 used the RCP8.5 scenario, with about 4,500 of the articles linking RCP8.5 to the concept of “business-as-usual”. Their analysis showed how RCP8.5 was misused not only by individual researchers, but also by influential science agencies like the IPCC and the US National Climate Assessment (USNCA), which has directly led to misleading coverage in prominent media outlets.

¹ This extreme scenario is useful for modelers, since a large forcing generates a large response (warming) making it easier to assess a model’s sensitivity. But that’s very different than claiming it is a plausible future.

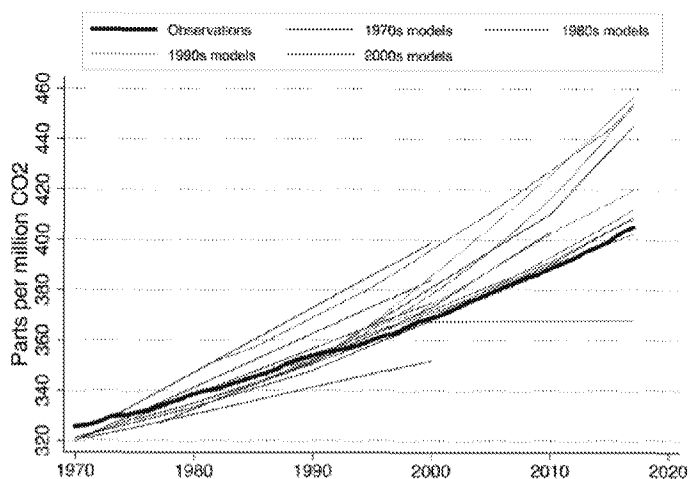


Figure 3.3.1 Comparison of observed atmospheric CO₂ levels (black line) with scenario projections (colored lines, mainly IPCC) since the 1970s. Source: Hausfather et al. (2019) Figure S4.

Pielke and Ritchie (2020) reported new studies using RCP8.5 were published at a rate of about 20 per day, with about two per day specifically linking RCP8.5 and “business as usual.” They conclude that the climate research community has spent a decade “committing scientific resources to science fiction” and that “The scientific literature has become imbalanced in an apocalyptic direction.”

The IPCC developed a new set of scenarios for AR6, the “Shared Socioeconomic Pathway” (SSP) scenarios, which have continued the bias shown in the RCP and SRES scenarios. Figure 3.3.2 shows total global observed CO₂ emissions compiled by the International Energy Agency (IEA) merged with the emission projection from the IEA taking account of energy use projections and current policies. The other lines show the range of IPCC SSP scenarios (SSP1-SSP5). As of 2023, global CO₂ emissions have been tracking well below SSP3-SSP7.0 and even below SSP2-4.5 and higher.

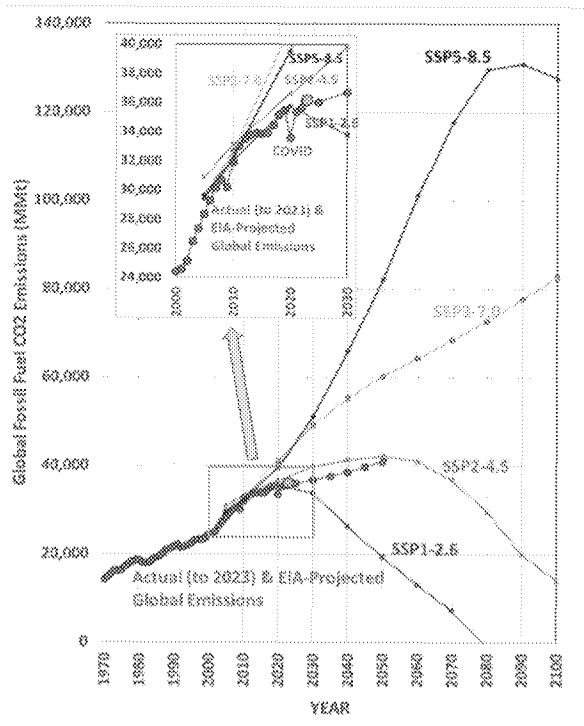


Figure 3.3.2. Observed and projected CO₂ emissions. Source: IPCC (SSP scenarios) and Energy Information Administration (EIA). Green: observed historical emissions and EIA projections. Other lines: SSP1-5. Data source: Friedlingstein *et al.* (2024).

3.3.2 The carbon cycle relating emissions and concentrations

Carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel burning (and to a lesser extent land-use biomass burning, deforestation and cement production) have led to steadily increasing CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere, as shown in Fig. 3.1.3. The relation between emissions and concentration is determined by the global carbon cycle of land and ocean processes that exchange carbon with the atmosphere. Our understanding of these processes was reviewed by Crisp *et al.* (2021).

There are about 850 Gt of carbon (GtC) in the Earth's atmosphere², almost all of it in the form of CO₂. Each year, biological processes (plant growth and decay) and physical processes (ocean absorption and outgassing) exchange about 200 GtC of that carbon with the Earth's surface (roughly 80 GtC with the land and 120 GtC with the oceans). Before human activities became significant, removals

² Because CO₂ is chemically transformed through the course of the carbon cycle, it is more convenient to track atoms of carbon rather than molecules of CO₂. One gigatonne of carbon (GtC) is equivalent to about 3.7 Gt of CO₂.

from the atmosphere were roughly in balance with additions. But burning fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas) takes carbon out of the ground and adds it to the annual exchange. That addition (together with a much smaller contribution from cement manufacturing) amounted to 10.3 GtC in 2023, or only about 5 percent of the annual exchange.

The carbon cycle accommodates about 50 percent of humanity's small annual injection of carbon into the air by naturally sequestering it through plant growth and oceanic uptake, while the remainder accumulates in the atmosphere (Ciais *et al.*, 2013). For that reason, the annual increase in atmospheric CO₂ concentration averages only about half of that naively expected from human emissions.

To project future CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere, and hence future human influences on the climate, it is important to know how the carbon cycle might change in the future. The historical near-constancy of that 50% fraction means that the more CO₂ humanity has produced, the faster nature removed it from the atmosphere. That 50% fraction changes somewhat from year to year due to natural carbon cycle imbalances from El Nino, La Nina, and varying weather patterns. There was also a substantial additional reduction in atmospheric CO₂ after the 1991 eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, a curious result that has yet to be explained (Angert *et al.*, 2004).

The main processes that remove excess CO₂ from the atmosphere are increased growth of land vegetation (especially at high latitudes), some increase in the sequestering of carbon in soils, and uptake of CO₂ by the ocean due to the increasing partial pressure of atmospheric CO₂ over that of CO₂ dissolved in the ocean. All twenty land carbon cycle models tracked by the Global Carbon Project (Friedlingstein *et al.*, 2024) show land processes have been removing excess CO₂ at an increasing rate since 1959. This is consistent with a "global greening" phenomenon (Chapter 2.1) observed by satellites since monitoring of global greenness began in the 1982.

While land vegetation has been responding positively to more atmospheric CO₂, uptake of extra CO₂ by ocean biological processes remains too uncertain to be measured reliably. Our current understanding of these and many more carbon cycle processes was reviewed by Crisp *et al.* (2021).

CO₂ uptake by land processes

The uptake of extra CO₂ from the atmosphere by land surface processes (as also inferred from global greening) has been modeled with 20 different dynamic global vegetation models, the outputs of which are updated every year by the Global Carbon Project (Friedlingstein, 2024). As seen in Fig. 3.3.3, all of those models agree that vegetation and soils have been sequestering carbon from the atmosphere. But we also see that the long-term trends over 1959 to 2023 (65 years) vary widely between models, by nearly a factor of 7. This demonstrates that there remains considerable uncertainty in how fast land processes are removing CO₂ from the atmosphere, which in turn creates uncertainty in future atmospheric CO₂ concentrations, which are then an uncertainty in climate model simulations of future climate change. This demonstrates that there remains considerable uncertainty regarding how fast CO₂ from the atmosphere is being removed by land processes, which in turn translates into uncertainty regarding future atmospheric CO₂ concentrations. These uncertain future CO₂ concentrations then imply a source of uncertainty in climate model simulations of future climate change.

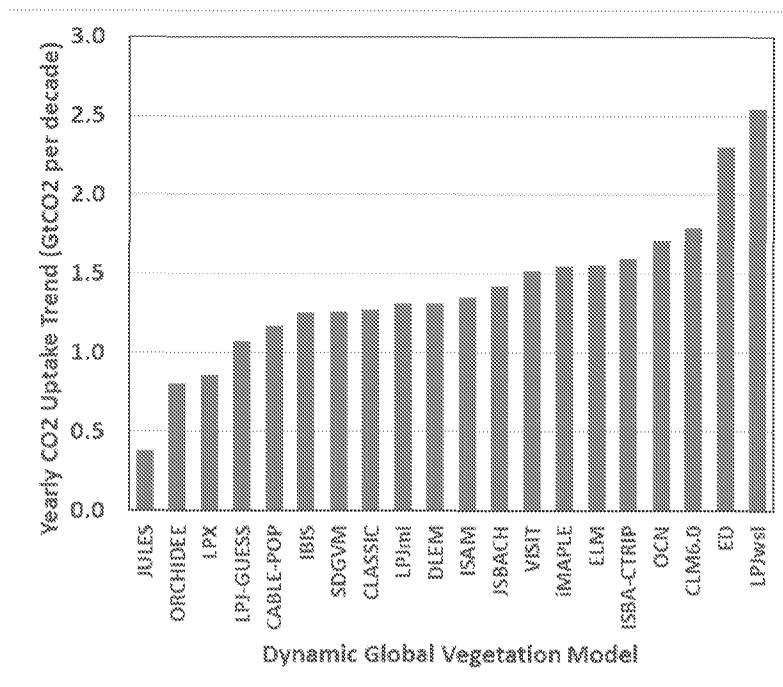


Figure 3.3.3 Decadal trends in the yearly trends of annual CO₂ uptake (GtCO₂ per year per decade) by land processes during 1959-2023 simulated by 20 different dynamic global vegetation models periodically reported by the Global Carbon Project (Friedlingstein, 2024).

CO₂ uptake by ocean processes

The uptake of extra CO₂ from the atmosphere by ocean processes has been modeled with 10 different dynamic global vegetation models, the outputs of which are updated every year by the Global Carbon Project (Friedlingstein, 2024). Like the results from the land models, all of the ocean models agree that the global oceans have been sequestering carbon from the atmosphere at an increasing rate during 1959-2023 (Fig. 3.3.4). Unlike the land models, however, the ocean models show much better agreement with each other, with the model producing the fastest increasing CO₂ uptake being only 65% faster than the model with the most slowly increasing CO₂ uptake. In spite of the relative agreement among models, Friedlingstein *et al.* (2022) notes that there is also substantial discrepancy between the different methods on the strength of the ocean sink over the last decade, particularly in the Southern Ocean.

Note that the average trend in CO₂ uptake across all land models in Fig. 3.3.3 is 25% larger than the average trend in ocean uptake. This suggests land processes are increasing in their ability to remove CO₂ faster than ocean processes are increasing their CO₂ sequestration.

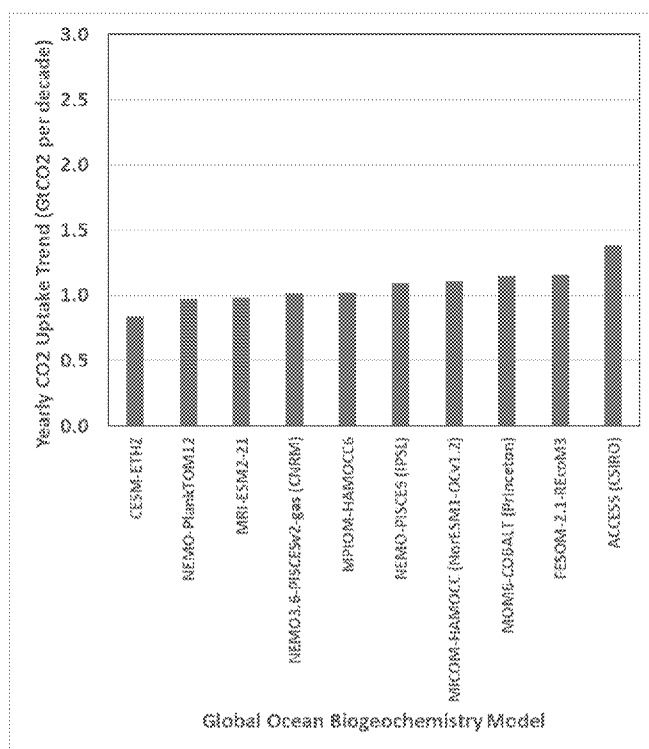


Figure 3.3.5 Trends of annual CO₂ uptake (GtCO₂ per year per decade) Decadal trends in the yearly CO₂ uptake by ocean processes during 1959-2023 simulated by 10 different ocean biogeochemistry models periodically reported by the Global Carbon Project (Friedlingstein, 2024).

References

- Angert, A., S. Biraud, Bonfils, C., Buermann, W. and I. Fung (2004). CO₂ seasonality indicates origins of post-Pinatubo sink. *Geophysical Research Letters* 31. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2004GL019760>" \t "_blank"]
- AR6: *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report* (2021) Working Group I Contribution. [HYPERLINK "<http://www.ipcc.ch>"].
- AR5: *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report* (2013) Working Group I Contribution. [HYPERLINK "<http://www.ipcc.ch>"].
- AR4: *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report* (2007) Working Group I Contribution. [HYPERLINK "<http://www.ipcc.ch>"].
- Burgess, Matthew et al (2021) *Environmental Research Letters* 16 014016 [HYPERLINK "<https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/abcdd2/meta>"]

- Ciais, P., C. Sabine, G. Bala, L. Bopp, V. Brovkin, ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2013): Carbon and Other Biogeochemical Cycles. In: Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Stocker, T.F., D. Qin, G.-K. Plattner, M. Tignor, ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA
- Connolly, Roman, Willie Soon, Michael Connolly ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2021) How much has the Sun influenced Northern Hemisphere temperature trends? An ongoing debate *Research in Astronomy and Astrophysics* 21(6) doi: 10.1088/1674-4527/21/6/131 [HYPERLINK "<https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1674-4527/21/6/131>"]
- Crisp, David & Dolman, Han (A.J.) & Tanhua, Toste & McKinley, Galen & Hauck, Judith & Bastos, Ana & Sitch, Stephen & Eggleston, Simon & Aich, Valentin. (2022). How Well Do We Understand the Land-Ocean-Atmosphere Carbon Cycle?. *Reviews of Geophysics*. 60. 10.1029/2021RG000736.
- De Laat, A.T.J., and A.N. Maurellis (2006), Evidence for influence of anthropogenic surface processes on lower tropospheric and surface temperature trends, *International Journal of Climatology* 26:897–913.
- Friedlingstein, P., and 95 co-authors (2024): Global Carbon Budget 2024, *Earth System Science Data* 14(4), [HYPERLINK "<https://essd.copernicus.org/preprints/essd-2024-519>"]
- Hausfather ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2019) “Evaluating the Performance of Past Climate Model Projections” *Geophysical Research Letters* 47(1) [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2019GL085378>"]
- Hausfather, Z. and G. Peters (2020) “Emissions – the ‘business as usual’ story is misleading” *Nature* 29 January 2020 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00177-3>"]
- Jenkins, S., Smith, C., Allen, M. ~~et al.~~ *et al.* Tonga eruption increases chance of temporary surface temperature anomaly above 1.5 °C. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* 13, 127–129 (2023). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-022-01568-2>"]
- Jones, P. D., P. Y. Groisman, M. Coughlan, N. Plummer, W.-C. Wang, and T. R. Karl (1990), Assessment of urbanization effects in time series of surface air temperature over land, *Nature*, 347, 169 – 172
- Liu, Pengfei ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2021) “Improved estimates of preindustrial biomass burning reduce the magnitude of aerosol climate forcing in the Southern Hemisphere” *Science Advances* 7(22) May 2021 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abc1379>"]
- McKittrick, R.R. and P.J. Michaels (2007), Quantifying the influence of anthropogenic surface processes and inhomogeneities on gridded global climate data, *Journal of Geophysical Research*, 112, D24S09, doi:10.1029/2007JD008465.
- McKittrick, Ross and Joel Wood (2013) Co-fluctuation patterns of per capita carbon dioxide emissions: The role of energy markets. *Energy Economics* 39 pp. 1-12 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0140988313000649>"]
- McKittrick, Ross R. (2010) [HYPERLINK "<https://www.rossmckittrick.com/uploads/4/8/0/8/4808045/spp.publishedversion.pdf>" \t "_blank"] [HYPERLINK "<http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/spp.2010.1.1/issue-files/spp.2010.1.issue-1.xml>"] Vol 1. No. 1., July 2010
- McKittrick, Ross R. (2013) Encompassing Tests of Socioeconomic Signals in Surface Climate Data. *Climatic Change* doi 10.1007/s10584-013-0793-5. Volume 120, Issue 1-2. [HYPERLINK "<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10584-013-0793-5>"]
- McKittrick, Ross R. and Nicolas Nierenberg (2010) [HYPERLINK "https://www.rossmckittrick.com/uploads/4/8/0/8/4808045/final_jesm_dec2010.formatted.pdf"]. [HYPERLINK "<http://iopress.metapress.com/content/n83k07278212/>"], 35(3,4) pp. 149-175. DOI 10.3233/JEM-2010-0336
- McKittrick, Ross R., Mark Strazicich and Junsoo Lee (2012) “[HYPERLINK "<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/for.2248/abstract>" \t "_blank"]” *Journal of Forecasting*, Vol 32, Issue 5, pp 435-451 DOI: 10.1002/for.2248.
- Oke, T.R., 1973: City size and the urban heat island, *Atmospheric Environment* 7, 769-779

- Parker, D.E. (2006) “A Demonstration that Large-Scale Warming is not Urban.” *Journal of Climate* 19:2882—2895.
- Peterson, Thomas C., Kevin P. Gallo, Jay Lawrimore, Timothy W. Owen, Alex Huang, David A. McKittrick (1999) Global rural temperature trends. *Geophysical Research Letters* February 1999 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/1998GL900322>"]
- Pielke, Roger and Ritchie, Justin (2020) “Systemic Misuse of Scenarios in Climate Research and Assessment” *Social Sciences Research Network* April 2020, available at: [HYPERLINK "<https://ssrn.com/abstract=3581777>"]
- Scaffeta, Nicola, Richard C. Willson, Jae N. Lee and Dong Wu (2019) Modeling Quiet Solar Luminosity Variability from TSI Satellite Measurements and Proxy Models during 1980–2018. *Remote Sensing* 11 (21) 2569 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3390/rs11212569>"]
- Schoeberl, M.R., Y. Wang, G. Taha, D.J. Zawada, R. Ueyama and A. Dessler, 2024. Evolution of the climate forcing during the two years after the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai eruption. *J. Geophys. Res.*, 129.
- Soon, W.; Connolly, R.; Connolly, M.; Akasofu, S.-I.; Baliunas, S.; ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2023) The Detection and Attribution of Northern Hemisphere Land Surface Warming (1850–2018) in Terms of Human and Natural Factors: Challenges of Inadequate Data. *Climate* 2023, 11, 179. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3390/cli11090179>"]
- Spencer, Roy W, John R Christy and William D. Braswell (2025) Urban Heat Island Effects in U.S. Summer Surface Temperature Data, 1895–2023 *Journal of Applied Meteorology and Climatology* April 2025 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/JAMC-D-23-0199.1>" \t "_blank"]
- Wickham C, R Rohde , RA Muller, J Wurtele, J Curry, ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2013) Influence of Urban Heating on the Global Temperature Land Average using Rural Sites Identified from MODIS Classifications. *Geoinformatics and Geostatistics: An Overview* 1:2.
- Zacharias, Pia (2014) An Independent Review of Existing Total Solar Irradiance Records. *Surveys in Geophysics* 35 pp. 897—912 [HYPERLINK "<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10712-014-9294-y>"]

OUO – Official Use Only – OUO – Confidential Draft – Pre-Review – Do Not Distribute

PART II: CLIMATE RESPONSE TO CO₂ EMISSIONS

4 CLIMATE SENSITIVITY TO CO₂ FORCING

Chapter Summary

There is growing recognition that climate models are not fit for the purpose of determining the Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity (ECS) of the climate to increasing CO₂. The IPCC has turned to data-driven approaches using historical data and paleoclimate reconstructions, but their reliability is diminished by data inadequacies.

Data-driven ECS estimates tend to be lower than climate model-generated values. The IPCC AR6 upper bound for the likely range of ECS is 4.0°C, lower than the AR5 value of 4.5°C. This lowering of the upper bound seems well justified by paleoclimatic data. The IPCC AR6 lower bound for the likely range of ECS is 2.5°C, substantially higher than the AR5 value of 1.5°C. This raising of the lower bound is more weakly less well justified. Evidence since the AR6 finds the lower bound of the likely range to be around 1.8°C.

4.1 Introduction

The climate’s response to increasing concentrations of CO₂ is central to the scientific debate on anthropogenic climate change, and so also to the public debate on “climate action.” The simplest measure of that response is the rise in the global average surface temperature, quantified by the Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity (ECS). ECS is defined as the amount of warming expected in response to a doubling of CO₂ from its pre-industrial concentration of 280 ppm, after all climate components have had time to adjust. Some components, like temperatures in the lower atmosphere (troposphere), adjust rapidly, while others such as the deep ocean and cryosphere might take as long as centuries. A related measure, the Transient Climate Response (TCR), better describes the shorter time scales; it is defined as the amount of warming when the CO₂ concentration is doubled by rising one percent annually for 70 years.

The 1979 Charney Report for the US National Academy of Sciences (National Research Council 1979) proposed that the most likely ECS was $3.0 \pm 1.5^\circ\text{C}$. The IPCC repeatedly reaffirmed that range with only minor variations until its most recent AR6. AR5 termed 1.5–4.5°C as the *likely* range (66 percent probability) and stated that ECS is *extremely unlikely* (95 percent probability) to be below 1.0°C and very unlikely (90 percent probability) to exceed 6.5°C.

The uncertainty in ECS has remained stubbornly wide, despite many individual studies that claimed to narrow it (Hausfather 2023). Most recently, AR6 narrowed the *likely* range to 2.5–4.0°C and deemed the *very likely* range to be 2.0–5.0°C. This narrowing on the low end is disputed, as will be discussed below.

Uncertainties in ECS are highly consequential for policy making. As will be discussed in Chapter 11, economic models use ECS values to project the costs of CO₂ emissions. The traditional value (3.0 °C) has typically yielded modest global social costs of CO₂ emissions, sufficient to justify some policy actions, but mostly deferred to later in this century. If ECS is very high (above 4.5°C) immediate aggressive emission controls become more imperative, whereas no CO₂ emission controls are economically justifiable for ECS below 2.0°C (Dayaratna et al. 2016, 2020). Obtaining a precise estimate is impossible, so policy making needs to account for the uncertainty.

~~Climate scientists use multiple lines of evidence to determine the Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity.~~
~~Climate model simulations~~
~~Historical observations~~
~~Paleoclimatic reconstructions~~

~~Process understanding of feedbacks~~

By itself, the equilibrium warming effect of a doubling of atmospheric CO₂ is slightly more than 1 °C (Soden and Held 2006). Larger values of ECS arise from positive feedbacks that amplify the CO₂ warming. Water vapor feedback is positive: a warmer atmosphere may have more water vapor, which itself is a powerful greenhouse gas. Warmer temperatures also result in less snow and sea ice cover, allowing the Earth to absorb more of the sun's radiation. Some simple estimates of these feedbacks increase the ECS to around 2 °C (Sherwood et al., 2020).

Climate scientists use multiple lines of evidence to determine the Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity:

- Climate model simulations
- Historical observations
- Paleoclimatic observations
- Process understanding of feedbacks

Values of ECS above 2 °C arise primarily from positive cloud feedbacks whose magnitude, and even sign, are highly uncertain. Elements of cloud feedback include changes in the latitudinal distribution of clouds, changes in the distribution of cloud height (changes in low versus high clouds), changes to the phase of clouds (ice versus liquid), changes in cloud particle size (associated with changes in concentration and/or composition of aerosol particles), changes in the precipitation efficiency of clouds, and even changes in how clouds are distributed over the daily solar cycle (Curry and Webster, 1999). It is difficult for climate models to simulate any of these processes correctly owing to their small scale, let alone predict how they will change in the future. Further, cloud processes modulate the magnitudes of the water vapor, lapse rate, and the surface albedo feedbacks.

4.2 Model-based estimates of climate sensitivity

The ECS ranges given in IPCC AR4 and AR5 were obtained primarily by examining the behaviour of large-scale climate models, also called General Circulation Models (GCMs). However, the IPCC changed course in its AR6 when it turned to a more direct data-driven methodology. Here we discuss some of the pitfalls of using GCMs to try to determine the Earth's climate sensitivity.

ECS is an emergent property of climate models—that is, it is not directly parameterized or tuned. Historically, collections of parameterizations have been chosen to produce an expected value of climate sensitivity, particularly with regards to sub-grid-scale cloud processes, particularly in AR4 and to a lesser extent in AR5. Otherwise plausible GCMs and parameter selections have been discarded because of perceived conflict with this warming rate, or aversion to a model's climate sensitivity being outside an accepted range. For example, even in a CMIP6 model, Mauritsen and Roeckner (2020) state the following regarding their Max Planck Institute climate model (emphasis added):

“We have documented how we tuned the MPI-ESM1.2 global climate model to match the instrumental record of warming; an endeavor which has clearly been successful. Due to the historical order of events, the choice was to do this practically by *targeting an ECS of about 3 K using cloud feedbacks*, as opposed to tuning the aerosol forcing.”

In other words, the modelers chose an ECS value of 3 °C and then tuned the cloud parameterizations to match their intended result.

Direct warming from CO₂ doubling is only about 1°C (Hall and Manabe 1997; Soden and Held 2006); further warming arises from climate feedbacks that are not explicitly resolved by the GCM but rely on parameterizations of physical processes. Higher values of ECS arise primarily from assumed positive cloud feedbacks, whereas the magnitude and even the sign of the feedbacks are very uncertain. Elements of cloud feedback include changes in the latitudinal distribution of clouds, changes in the distribution of cloud height (changes in low versus high clouds), changes to the phase of clouds (ice versus liquid), changes in cloud particle size (associated with changes in concentration and/or composition of aerosol particles), changes in the precipitation efficiency of clouds, and even changes in how clouds are distributed over the daily solar cycle (Curry and Webster, 1999). It is difficult for GCMs to simulate any of these processes correctly owing to their small scale, let alone predict how they will change in the future. Further, cloud processes modulate the magnitudes of the water vapor, lapse rate, and the surface albedo feedbacks.

ECS can be determined from climate model simulations by doubling the concentration of CO₂ and allowing several centuries for the warming to equilibrate. To avoid the necessity of long simulations, “effective climate sensitivity” is commonly evaluated from a 150-year simulation in response to a sudden quadrupling of CO₂.

The spread of ECS values from the CMIP5 ensemble of climate models used in the AR5 was 2.0–4.7°C; that range increased for the CMIP6 models used in the AR6 to between 1.8 and 5.7°C (Chen *et al.*, 2021, Scaffeta 2021, see Figure 54.1). Far from settling the model-based sensitivity of climate system uncertainties appear to be growing. The main cause of the overall upward shift in ECS in CMIP6 relative to CMIP5 is a larger positive cloud feedback, driven by changes to the cloud parameterizations in many CMIP6 models (Zelinka *et al.*, 2020)

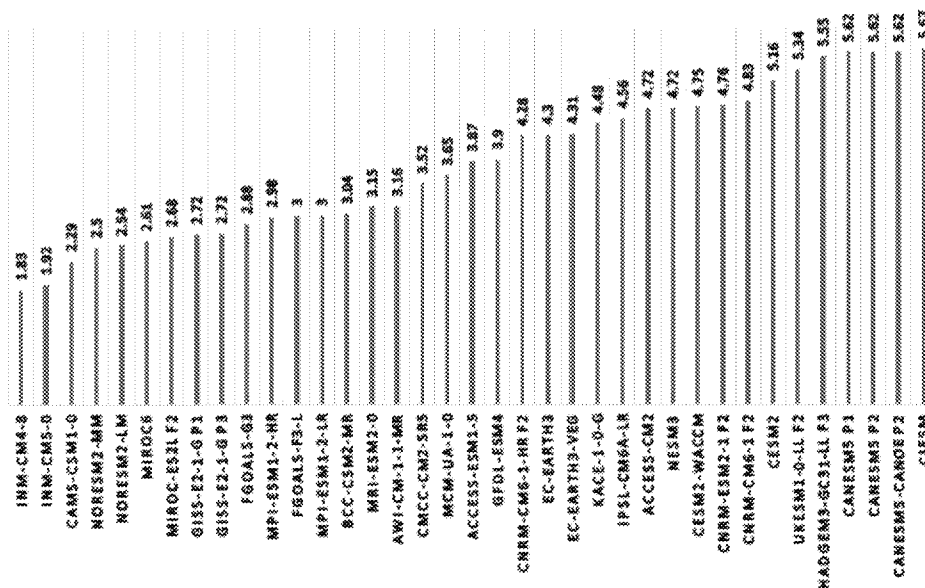


Figure 4.1 Equilibrium Climate Sensitivities in °C of 37 climate models from the CMIP6 ensemble. Identifiers for the various models appear along the horizontal axis. From (Scafetta, 2021) <https://www.mdpi.com/2225-1154/9/11/161>

Because of concerns about model tuning and the high sensitivity to cloud parameterizations, the IPCC AR6 (2021) did not rely on climate model simulations in their assessment of climate sensitivity, relying instead on other methods, chiefly a recent empirical estimate.

4.3 Data-driven estimates of climate sensitivity

Climate sensitivity can also be estimated from instrumental records of surface temperatures and ocean heat content, combined with estimates of how climate forcings (e.g., greenhouse gases, solar, volcanoes, aerosols) have changed in the past (Otto *et al.*, 2013). Using this information, a simple empirical model called an Energy Balance Model can be employed. It requires estimating a feedback parameter whose uncertainties are highly amplified in the resulting ECS (Roe and Baker, 2007).

The accuracy of the data-driven methods depends on the quality of the input data. Assumptions are needed about ocean heat storage, and the ocean data is inadequate. The greatest source of uncertainty is the amount and composition of aerosol particles and their interactions with cloud radiative properties (the so-called aerosol indirect effect; see Figures 3.1.1, 3.1.2). Climate models exhibit warming in response to GHGs but cooling in response to aerosols (Schwartz *et al.*, 2007). Observed 20th century warming can be shown to be consistent either with low ECS and low aerosol cooling, or high ECS and high aerosol cooling. Since fossil fuel use adds both GHGs and aerosols to the atmosphere, both effects need to be estimated to isolate the warming effect of CO₂. Over time, the IPCC's estimate of the cooling effect of aerosols has declined (Lewis, 2023).

Paleoclimate proxies are also used to evaluate the sensitivity of past climates, by comparing paleoclimate changes in the Earth's temperatures to estimates of changes in forcings. The two most informative periods are the last glacial maximum (around 20,000 years ago), which was about 3–7°C colder than today, and a mid-Pliocene period (roughly three million years ago), which was 1–3°C warmer than today. The limits on cooling during the last glacial maximum give the best single evidence that high values of climate sensitivity are unlikely. However, paleoclimate estimates are associated with very large uncertainties in the estimated temperatures and forcings. Further, estimates of climate sensitivity based on past climate states may not be representative of applicable to the current state of the climate system.

A recurring theme in the climate literature is that ECS estimates based on historical data are smaller than ECS estimates inferred from climate models (Sherwood and Forest 2024). About 15 estimates based on historical data appeared in the peer-reviewed literature between 2012 and 2024 yielding ECS best estimates between 1.0°C and 2.5°C, although critics have questioned some of the methods and the data quality. For the AR6, the IPCC placed primary weight on the results of Sherwood *et al.* (2020) that combined historical and paleoclimate proxies with the process-based approach and yielded a best estimate of 3.1°C with a *likely* range of 2.6–3.9°C. Lewis (2022) raised a number of concerns about this result, including methodological errors, outdated input values, and use of subjective versus objective Bayesian priors in the analysis. Lewis' analysis found that climate sensitivity is estimated to be much lower and better constrained than in the Sherwood *et al.* analysis – median 2.2°C (1.8–2.7°C in the 17–83 percent *likely* range, and 1.6–3.2°C in the 5–95 percent *very likely* range). The IPCC AR6 estimated only a 5 percent probability that ECS was below 2.3°C, whereas Lewis estimated it to be over 50 percent. The most recent publications on the debate between Sherwood *et al.* and Lewis further defend their respective positions: Sherwood and Foster (2024) and Lewis (2025).

An argument emphasized in AR6 is that data-driven ECS estimates might understate the future warming response to GHGs because of a so-called “pattern effect” (Forster *et al.*, 2021). The tropical Pacific is believed to strongly influence the overall efficiency with which the Earth radiates heat to space, but some regions remove heat more efficiently than others. If the west-to-east temperature gradient in the tropical Pacific is weakened in a warming climate, warming would ~~concentration-concentrate~~ where heat is less efficiently removed, raising ECS.

Most climate models simulate that rising GHGs will weaken the ~~east-west~~ temperature gradient, which led the IPCC in the AR6 to conclude that data-driven ECS estimates understated the *future* ECS value. However, Seager *et al.* (2019) pointed out that, contrary to models, the ~~east-west~~ temperature gradient has been strengthening over time. They further argued that the mechanism predicting otherwise in climate models was based on a faulty characterization of oceanic dynamics and there is no reason to expect the gradient to weaken. A similar argument was recently made by Lee *et al.* (2024), who concluded that “the trajectory of the observed trend reflects the response to increasing GHG loading in the atmosphere”; in other words, GHG warming should lead to a future strengthening rather than a weakening of the temperature gradient. Increased efficiency of atmospheric cooling implies, if anything, that the future ECS in a warming climate may be *lower* than current estimates.

4.4 Transient Climate Response

The Transient Climate Response (TCR) provides a more useful observational constraint on climate sensitivity. TCR is the ~~amount of warming~~ global temperature increase that results when CO₂ is increased at an annual rate of 1 percent over a period of 70 years (i.e., doubled gradually). Relative to the ECS, observationally determined values of TCR avoid the problems of uncertainties in ocean heat uptake and the fuzzy boundary in defining equilibrium arising from a range of timescales for the longer-term feedback processes (e.g., ice sheets). TCR is more generally related to peak warming and better constrained by historical warming, than ECS. IPCC AR6 judged the *very likely* range of TCR to be 1.2–2.4°C. In contrast to ECS, the upper bound of TCR is more tightly constrained. For comparison, the TCR values determined by Lewis (2023) are 1.25 to 2.0°C, showing much better agreement with the AR6 values than was seen in a comparison of the ECS values.

As will be discussed in Chapter 6, a real-world ECS smaller than the model average is supported by studies that show climate models on average overestimate the observed surface and troposphere warming over the past 50 years. Lower sensitivities also align with evidence from consistent fingerprinting (Section 8), where model responses need to be downscaled to align with observed trends.

References

- Carbon Brief. (2020, July 22). Explainer: How scientists estimate climate sensitivity. [HYPERLINK "https://www.carbonbrief.org/explainer-how-scientists-estimate-climate-sensitivity"]
- Carbon Brief. (2020, July 22). Guest post: Why low-end ‘climate sensitivity’ can now be ruled out. [HYPERLINK "https://www.carbonbrief.org/guest-post-why-low-end-climate-sensitivity-can-now-be-ruled-out"]
- Carbon Brief. (2021, August 9). In-depth Q&A: The IPCC’s sixth assessment report on climate science. [HYPERLINK "https://www.carbonbrief.org/in-depth-qa-the-ipccs-sixth-assessment-report-on-climate-science"]
- Chen, D., ~~et al.~~ (2021). Framing, context, and methods. In V. Masson-Delmotte ~~et al.~~ (Eds.), *Climate change 2021: The physical science basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge University Press.

- Curry, J. A., & Webster, P. J. (1999). Thermodynamic feedbacks in the climate system. In *Thermodynamics of atmospheres and oceans* (pp. 351–385). Academic Press.
- Dayaratna, Kevin, Ross McKittrick and David Kreutzer (2017) Empirically-Constrained Climate Sensitivity and the Social Cost of Carbon. *Climate Change Economics* April 2017 DOI: [[HYPERLINK "http://dx.doi.org/10.1142/S2010007817500063"](http://dx.doi.org/10.1142/S2010007817500063)]
- Dayaratna, Kevin, Ross McKittrick and Patrick J. Michaels (2020) Climate Sensitivity, Agricultural Productivity and the Social Cost of Carbon in FUND. *Environmental Economics and Policy Studies* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10018-020-00263-w>
- Forster, P., et al. (2021). The Earth's energy budget, climate feedbacks, and climate sensitivity. In V. Masson-Delmotte et al. (Eds.), *Climate change 2021: The physical science basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hausfather, Z. (2020, July 22). Explainer: How scientists estimate climate sensitivity. Carbon Brief. [[HYPERLINK "https://www.carbonbrief.org/explainer-how-scientists-estimate-climate-sensitivity"](https://www.carbonbrief.org/explainer-how-scientists-estimate-climate-sensitivity)]
- Lan, X., Tans, P., & Thoning, K. W. (2025). Trends in globally-averaged CO₂ determined from NOAA Global Monitoring Laboratory measurements. NOAA Global Monitoring Laboratory. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.15138/9NOH-ZH07"](https://doi.org/10.15138/9NOH-ZH07)]
- Lee, S., Byrne, M. P., Loikith, P. C., & O'Dell, C. W. (2024). Zonal contrasts of the tropical Pacific climate predicted by a global constraint. *Climate Dynamics*, 62(1–2), 229–246. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-023-06741-7"](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-023-06741-7)]
- Lewis, N. (2023). Objectively combining climate sensitivity evidence. *Climate Dynamics*, 61(9–10), 3155–3163. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-022-06398-8"](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-022-06398-8)]
- Lewis, N. (2025). Comment on “Can uncertainty in climate sensitivity be narrowed further?” by Sherwood and Forest (2024). *EGU sphere* [preprint]. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.5194/egusphere-2025-1179"](https://doi.org/10.5194/egusphere-2025-1179)]
- Mauritsen, T., & Roeckner, E. (2020). Tuning the MPI-ESM1.2 global climate model to improve the match with instrumental record warming by lowering its climate sensitivity. *Journal of Advances in Modeling Earth Systems*, 12, e2019MS002037. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1029/2019MS002037"](https://doi.org/10.1029/2019MS002037)]
- Otto, A., Otto, F. E. L., Boucher, O., Church, J., Hegerl, G., Forster, P. M., Gregory, J. M., & Johnson, G. C. (2013). Energy budget constraints on climate response. *Nature Geoscience*, 6(6), 415–416. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1038/ngeo1836"](https://doi.org/10.1038/ngeo1836)]
- Pachauri, R. K., & Meyer, L. (Eds.). (2015). Climate change 2014: Synthesis report. *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*.
- Roe, G. and M. Baker (2007). Why is climate sensitivity so unpredictable? *Science* 318, 629–632. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1144735"](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1144735)]
- Scafetta, N. (2021). Testing the CMIP6 GCM simulations versus surface temperature records from 1980–1990 to 2011–2021: High ECS is not supported. *Climate*, 9(11), 161. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.3390/cli9110161"](https://doi.org/10.3390/cli9110161)]
- Schwartz, S. E., R. J. Charlson, H. Rodhe (2007). Quantifying climate change—Too rosy a picture? *Nature Climate Change* 1, 23–24, [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1038/climate.2007.22"](https://doi.org/10.1038/climate.2007.22)]
- Seager, R., Cane, M., Ting, M., Naik, N., Clement, A., DiNezio, P., & Lee, D. E. (2019). Strengthening tropical Pacific zonal sea surface temperature gradient consistent with rising greenhouse gases. *Nature Climate Change*, 9(7), 517–522. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-019-0505-x"](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-019-0505-x)]
- Sherwood, S. C., & Forest, C. E. (2024). Opinion: Can uncertainty in climate sensitivity be narrowed further? *Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics*, 24(5), 2679–2686. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.5194/acp-24-2679-2024"](https://doi.org/10.5194/acp-24-2679-2024)]
- Sherwood, S. C., Bony, S., Boucher, O., Bretherton, C. S., Forster, P. M., Gregory, J. M., & Stevens, B. (2020). An assessment of Earth's climate sensitivity using multiple lines of evidence. *Reviews of Geophysics*, 58(4). [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1029/2019rg000678"](https://doi.org/10.1029/2019rg000678)]

- Soden, B. J., and I.M. Held (2006). An assessment of climate feedbacks in coupled ocean–atmosphere models. *Journal of Climate*, 19(14), 3354–3360. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/jcli3799.1>"]
- Zelinka, M. D., Myers, T. A., McCoy, D. T., Po-Chedley, S., Caldwell, P. M., Ceppi, P., Klein, S. A., & Taylor, K. E. (2020). Causes of higher climate sensitivity in CMIP6 models. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 47, e2019GL085782. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2019GL085782>"]

5 MODELS VERSUS OBSERVATIONS IN THE RECENT PAST

Chapter summary

Climate models show warming biases in many aspects of their reproduction of the past few decades. In response to observed changes in forcing inputs they produce too much warming at the surface (except in the models with lowest ECS), too much warming in the lower-and mid-troposphere and too much amplification of warming aloft.

Climate models also produce too much recent stratospheric cooling, too much water vapor increase, too much snow loss, and too much warming in the corn belt. The IPCC has acknowledged some of these issues but not all.

5.1 Introduction

Climate models are the primary tool used to project future climate changes in response to increasing atmospheric levels of anthropogenic greenhouse gases. They provide theoretical evidence underpinning energy policy changes, such as efforts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. To assess the fitness of climate models for this purpose, it is reasonable to ask how well they reproduce the current climate and its variations over the past century. The nearby box “Climate modeling” gives some detail on how climate models work.

Of great concern is the fact that, after several decades of the climate modeling enterprise involving approximately three dozen models operated by research centers around the world, the range of future warming they produce in response to a hypothetical doubling of atmospheric CO₂ extends over a factor of three, as we discussed in the previous chapter. This range of disagreement among models has not changed for decades.

Problems with climate models are not just in their disagreement over the future, but also in their ability to replicate the recent past. Here we review some of the most important metrics of climate model accuracy: ability to reproduce historical surface, tropospheric and stratospheric temperature trends, ability to reproduce the vertical warming profile and ability to reproduce other climate features such as snowfall and humidity. In all cases a persistent finding is that models on average err on the side of too much warming in response to observed historical forcings.

BOX: Climate modeling

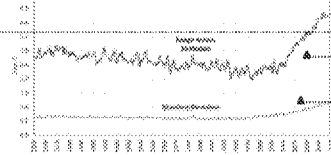
Most climate models, except for the simplest ones, represent Earth's land surface using a grid of squares, typically 100 km wide. To simulate the atmosphere, 10 to 20 layers of grid boxes are stacked above these squares. The ocean is modeled using a similar but finer grid, resulting in approximately one million grid boxes for the atmosphere and 100 million for the ocean.

The computer models, based on physical laws, calculate how air, water, and energy move between grid boxes over time. The time step can be as small as 10 minutes, and repeating this process millions of times allows the simulation of climate over centuries. Running these models, even on the most powerful supercomputers, can take months. Comparing simulation results with historical climate data helps assess the accuracy of a model, while projections into the future estimate climate changes under assumed human and natural influences.

Despite sounding straightforward, climate modeling is highly complex. Many critical processes occur at scales smaller than the 100 km grid size. For instance, the flows of sunlight and heat in the atmosphere depend strongly on cloud cover. Since tracking individual clouds is impractical, researchers must make "subgrid" assumptions about the distribution of clouds in each grid box. Snow and ice cover, which affects how much sunlight is reflected or absorbed by the surface, is another subgrid factor.

Each subgrid assumption requires numerical parameters, which must be carefully set. Modelers initially estimate these parameters based on physics and observed climate patterns, then run the model. Because early results often diverge significantly from real-world observations, they "tune" these parameters to better match observed climate features. Different modeling teams use distinct assumptions and tuning strategies, leading to varied outcomes. Tuning is a necessary but delicate aspect of climate modeling, as it is in any complex system. Poor tuning can result in inaccurate simulations, while excessive tuning risks artificially steering results toward predetermined conclusions.

The spread of model indicators—Earth's 1880 (Figure 6B.1) warming was only process.



be very wide. One of the most basic about 2°C across CMIP6 models prior to 2000 to over 4 °C. For comparison, 20th century annual differences among models' physical

Figure 6B.1 CMIP6 Average surface temperature range across 30 models) and standard deviation using SSP5-85 scenario. Data from KNMI Climate Explorer website at [HYPERLINK "<https://climate.knmi.nl/start.cgi>" "v" "blank"]

Beyond the models' ability to reproduce features of today's climate, the critical issue for society is how well they predict responses to subtle human influences, such as greenhouse gas emissions, aerosol cooling, and land-use changes. The most crucial aspect models must capture correctly is "feedbacks." These occur when climate changes triggered by greenhouse gases either amplify or suppress further warming. In general the modeled net effect of all feedbacks doubles or triples the direct warming impact of CO₂.

Formatted: Left, Indent: Left: 0.06", Right: 0.12", Border: Top: (No border), Bottom: (No border), Left: (No border), Right: (No border), Tab stops: Not at 0.5"

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Superscript

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 8 pt, Bold

Formatted: Caption, Centered, Indent: Left: 0", Right: 0"

Formatted: Font: 8 pt

Formatted: Font: 8 pt

Formatted: Font: 8 pt

Formatted: Font: 8 pt

Formatted: Font: 8 pt

Formatted: Left, Indent: Left: 0.06", Right: 0.12", Border: Top: (No border), Bottom: (No border), Left: (No border), Right: (No border), Tab stops: Not at 0.5"

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Left

5.2 Surface warming

A straightforward test of a climate model's validity is its ability to reproduce historical warming in response to known past changes in climate drivers such as greenhouse gases. Figure 5.2 is reproduced from Scafetta (2023), a peer-reviewed study that groups the latest-generation (CMIP6) climate models into low ECS (1.5 to 3.0 degrees C), medium ECS (3.0 to 4.5 degrees C) and high ECS (4.5 to 6.0 degrees C), and compares their post-1980 global average temperature simulation ranges to those of three surface temperature records and one satellite-based lower troposphere temperature data product.

The leftmost column shows that the low-ECS models track the post-1980 historical warming record reasonably well, but the middle and right columns show that the medium- and high-ECS models conspicuously over-predict the warming.

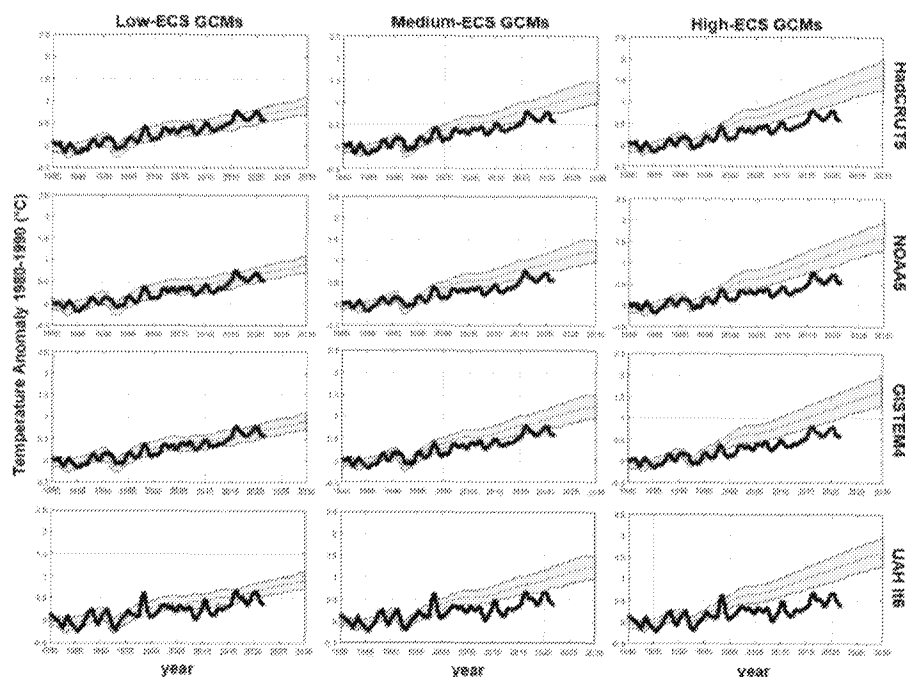


Figure 5.2: Model-Observational comparisons for Earth's surface warming. The columns correspond to model groups showing low-ECS to high-ECS, while the rows correspond to widely-used observed temperature records, the first three showing surface averages and the fourth showing the lower troposphere average. In each panel the yellow area denotes the mean and range ($\pm$ one standard deviation) of climate model simulations for that group. The thick black line shows the observed annual average temperature in the indicated source. Source: Scafetta (2023) Fig.2.

Spencer (2024) has also provided a useful summary of the Model-Observation mismatch by comparing trends in surface temperature data products with those in individual climate models, as summarized in Figure 5.3.

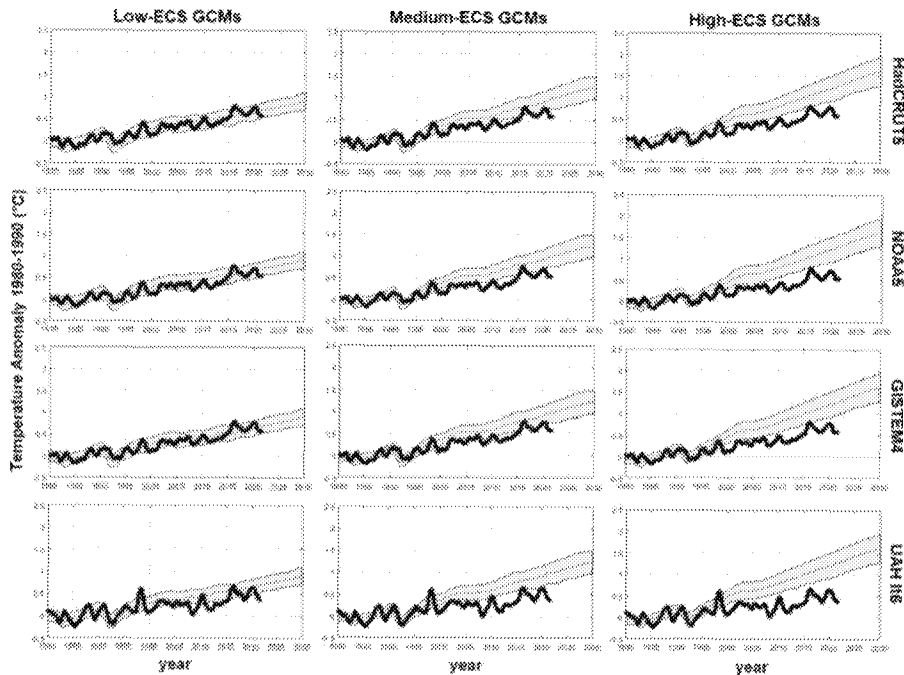


Figure 5.2: model-observational comparisons for Earth's surface warming. The columns correspond to model groups showing low-ECS to high-ECS, while the rows correspond to widely used observed temperature records, the first three showing surface averages and the fourth showing the lower troposphere average. In each panel the yellow area denotes the mean and range ($\pm$ one standard deviation) of climate model simulations for that group. The thick black line shows the observed annual average temperature in the indicated source. Source: Scafetta N. Climate Dynamics 2023 Fig.2.



he also provided a useful summary of the Model-Observation mismatch by comparing trends in surface temperature data products with those in individual climate models, as summarized in Figure 5.2.

Formatted: Caption

The discrepancy was flagged as a serious inconsistency in the first US Climate Change Science Program report (Karl *et al.*, 2006) and has been mentioned in every IPCC report since, but the discrepancy has gotten worse over time, and the bias is now global. McKittrick and Christy (2020) compared tropospheric warming trends in CMIP6 climate models to observed trends from satellites, weather balloons and reanalysis systems. Every model overpredicted the average observed warming trend over 1979-2014 in both Lower- and Mid-Troposphere layers, both globally and in the tropics. In most individual models the bias was statistically significant and on average across models it was highly significant.

Figure 5.4 presents the comparisons with data updated to 2024. The recent warm years moved the observed trend up slightly and widened the trend confidence intervals but the overall pattern remains the same; model bias is towards too much warming, in most cases the difference is statistically significant and on average the bias is statistically highly significant. McKittrick and Christy (2020) also showed that the bias is larger in high-ECS models, but even the models with lower average ECS predict too much warming. If future climate models were to realistically represent global tropospheric warming, they would likely be less sensitive than even the low-ECS members of the CMIP6 ensemble.

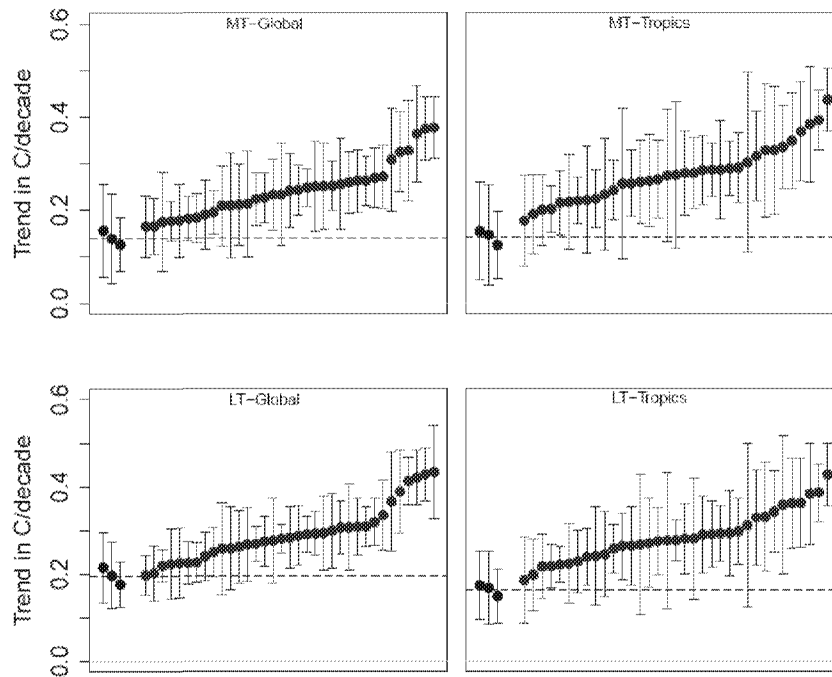


Figure 5.4: Observed versus CMIP6 modeled warming trends (°C/decade 1979-2024) in the global and tropical lower (LT) and mid-troposphere (MT). Uses methodology of McKittrick and Christy (2020) on updated data. Blue dots: warming trends with 95% confidence intervals bars for 3 data products (radiosondes, reanalysis and satellites) and 95% confidence interval bars. Blue dashed line: warming trend average for 3 observed series. Red dots: modeled warming trends with 95% confidence intervals in 35 models arranged lowest to highest.

Figure 5.4 presents the comparisons with data updated to 2024. The recent warm years moved the observed trend up slightly and widened the trend confidence intervals but the overall pattern remains the same; model bias is towards too much warming, in most cases the difference is statistically significant and on average the bias is statistically highly significant. McKittrick and Christy (2020) also showed that the bias is larger in high-ECS models, but even the models with lower average ECS predict too much warming. If future climate models were to realistically represent global tropospheric warming, they would likely be less sensitive than even the low-ECS members of the CMIP6 ensemble.

~~on average the bias is statistically highly significant. McKittrick and Christy (2020) also showed that the bias is larger in high-ECs models, but even the models with lower averaged ECs project too much warming. If future climate models were to realistically represent global tropospheric warming, they would likely be less sensitive than even the low-ECs members of the CMIP6 ensemble.~~

As mentioned the IPCC has long acknowledged the model-observation mismatch. For example AR6 pp. 443-444 offers this on the tropical troposphere (it does not address the global comparison):

Several studies since AR5 have continued to demonstrate an inconsistency between simulated and observed temperature trends in the tropical troposphere, with models simulating more warming than observations (Mitchell *et al.*, 2013, 2020; Santer *et al.*, 2017a, b; McKittrick and Christy, 2018; Po-Chedley *et al.*, 2021)... Over the 1979–2014 period, models are more consistent with observations in the lower troposphere, and least consistent in the upper troposphere around 200 hPa, where biases exceed 0.1°C per decade. Several studies using CMIP6 models suggest that differences in climate sensitivity may be an important factor contributing to the discrepancy between the simulated and observed tropospheric temperature trends (McKittrick and Christy, 2020; Po-Chedley *et al.*, 2021), though it is difficult to deconvolve the influence of climate sensitivity, changes in aerosol forcing and internal variability in contributing to tropospheric warming biases (Po-Chedley *et al.*, 2021). Another study found that the absence of a hypothesized negative tropical cloud feedback could explain half of the upper troposphere warming bias in one model (Mauritsen and Stevens, 2015).

... In summary, studies continue to find that CMIP5 and CMIP6 model simulations warm more than observations in the tropical mid- and upper-troposphere over the 1979–2014 period (Mitchell *et al.*, 2013, 2020; Santer *et al.*, 2017a, b; Suárez-Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2017; McKittrick and Christy, 2018), and that overestimated surface warming is partially responsible (Mitchell *et al.*, 2013; Po-Chedley *et al.*, 2021). ... Hence, we assess with *medium confidence* that CMIP5 and CMIP6 models continue to overestimate observed warming in the upper tropical troposphere over the 1979–2014 period by at least 0.1°C per decade,

Notably, despite the accumulation of evidence of excess model warming the IPCC only assigns *medium confidence* to the existence of a warming bias.

5.4 Vertical temperature profile mismatch

Another important model-observational discrepancy is the excess amplification with altitude found in climate models. The comparison was in the IPCC AR5 Chapter 10, although only in the online supplement (Figure 10.SM.1) and only in a figure whose formatting obscured the point. Figure 10.SM.1 is not referenced in the main IPCC report nor in any summary so readers would not have been aware of it. Although not apparent at first glance, it shows that the 1979–2010 warming in the lower troposphere is so small as to be consistent with no GHG forcing at all and is inconsistent with the model runs that do have GHG forcing. In Figure 5.6 we adapt IPCC AR5 Figure 10.SM.1 to draw out this critical point.

(Figure 10.SM.1) and only in a figure the formatting of which made the point difficult to see. Figure 10.SM.1 is not referenced in the main IPCC report nor in any summary so readers would not have been aware of it. Although not apparent at first glance, it shows that the 1979–2010 warming in the lower troposphere is so small as to be consistent with no GHG forcing at all, and is inconsistent with the model runs that do have GHG forcing. In Figure 5.6 we adapt IPCC AR5 Figure 10.SM.1 to draw out the critical point.

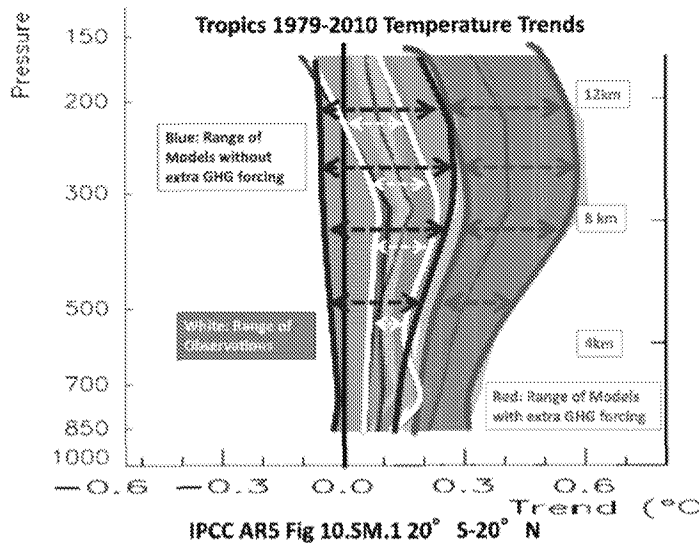


Figure 5.6: Vertical warming pattern for tropics (20S to 20N). Source: Annotated version of IPCC AR5 Figure 10.SM.1

Figure 5.6 compares model and observational temperature trends by altitude. Figure 5.6 compares temperature trends by altitude between models and observations between 20S and 20N (the tropics). In this region where the models say the warming should be strongest, the observations (shown here in white) lie within the “No CO₂” band and entirely outside the “with CO₂” red envelope. This means that in the entire tropical atmospheric column from the surface to the stratosphere, observed warming trends are so small they are as to be consistent with the output of models that have no anthropogenic CO₂ warming effect in them, and they are inconsistent with the entire envelope of warming trends generated by models forced with increased CO₂.

A similar comparison is shown in Christy and McNider (2017), an updated version of which (covering 1979-2024) is reproduced as Figure 5.7. Modeled temperature trends exceed observations from the surface through the top of the troposphere, with observed trends below the entire model range at most pressure levels. Also shown in Figure 5.7 is the tropical tropospheric temperature (TTT) average from three satellite data products (NOAA, UAH and RSS) compared to the same layer average from climate models for 1979-2024. Again the observed trends lie below the entire model range.

The wide range of choices made by modelers to characterize the physical processes in the models (see Box: Climate Modeling in Section 5.1 above) is seen by the large spread of trends in the middle troposphere, +40% about the median (Fig. 5.7). This vividly illustrates the uncertainties in attempts to model (parameterize) a complex system involving turbulence, moist thermodynamics, and energy fluxes over the full range of the tropical atmosphere’s time and space scales.

characterize the physical processes in the model (see Box: Climate Modeling in Section 5.1 above) is seen by the large spread of trends in the middle troposphere where values range over $\pm 40\%$ from the median value (Fig. 5.7). This illustrates the uncertainties characteristic of the varying attempts to model (parameterize) a complex system involving turbulence, moist thermodynamics and energy fluxes over the full range of time and space scales.

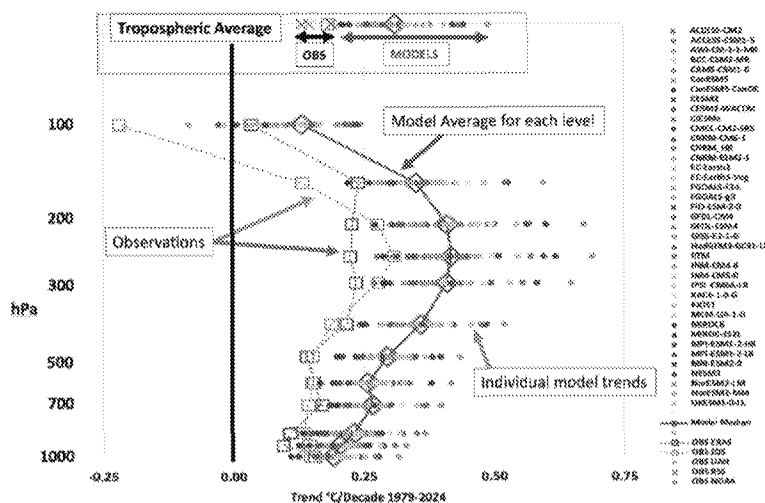


Figure 5.7: Modeled versus observed warming, tropical troposphere. Source: updated from Christy and McNider (2017) including data through 2024. Red line: model average. Green and blue lines: observational series (reanalysis).

This discrepancy has been the source of much controversy, with some arguing that even if there is very little observed warming aloft in the tropics, a “hotspot” still exists in the sense that the warming aloft is greater than at the surface. But there is good evidence that models also exaggerate the amplification rate. Klotzbach *et al.* (2009), showed that models project greater amplification with altitude than is observed. This result was subsequently confirmed by detailed time series analysis (Vogelsang and Nawaz 2016) who found that the model-observational difference is statistically significant.

The atmosphere's temperature profile is a case where models are not merely uncertain but also show a common bias relative to observations. This suggests that they share common errors in representing certain fundamental feedback processes. This is a case in which models are not merely uncertain but share a common bias compared to observations. This suggests the representation of certain fundamental physical processes in climate model feedbacks have large discrepancies not only among models but against the real climate.

The IPCC AR6 did not assess this issue.

5.5 Stratospheric cooling

An important element of the expected general “fingerprint” of anthropogenic climate change is simultaneous warming of the troposphere and cooling of the stratosphere. The IPCC AR6 acknowledged that cooling had been observed but only until the year 2000. The stratosphere has shown some warming since, contrary to model projections. An important element of the expected general “fingerprint” of anthropogenic climate change is simultaneous warming of the troposphere and cooling of the stratosphere. The IPCC AR6 acknowledged that cooling had been observed but only up to the year 2000. Thereafter the stratosphere has exhibited some warming, contrary to model projections.

The AR6 WG1 Ch 2 pp. 327-9 states (emphasis added):

Temperatures averaged through the full lower stratosphere (roughly 10–25 km) have decreased over 1980–2019 in all data products, with **the bulk of the decrease prior to 2000**. The decrease holds even if the influence of the El Chichon (1982) and Pinatubo (1991) volcanic eruptions on the trend, found by Steiner *et al.* (2020a) to have increased the 1979–2018 cooling trend by 0.06°C per decade, is removed. **Most datasets show no significant or only marginally significant trends over 2000–2019, and the results of Philipona *et al.* (2018) show weak increases over 2000–2015** in the very lowermost stratosphere sampled by radiosondes...

It is virtually certain that the lower stratosphere has cooled since the mid-20th century. However, most datasets show that **lower stratospheric temperatures have stabilized since the mid-1990s with no significant change over the last 20 years**. It is likely that middle and upper stratospheric temperatures have decreased since 1980, but there is low confidence in the magnitude.

The cited source, Philipona *et al.* (2018), in an article entitled “Radiosondes Show That After Decades of Cooling, the Lower Stratosphere Is Now Warming”, stated:

In response to continued greenhouse gas increases and stratospheric ozone depletion, climate models project continued tropospheric warming and stratospheric cooling over the coming decades. Global average satellite observations of lower stratospheric temperatures exhibit no significant trends since the turn of the century. In contrast, an analysis of vertically resolved radiosonde measurements from 60 stations shows an increase of lower stratospheric temperature since the turn of the century at altitudes between 15 and 30 km and over most continents. Trend estimates are somewhat sensitive to homogeneity assessment choices, but all investigated radiosonde data sets suggest a change from late twentieth century cooling to early 21st century warming in the lower stratosphere.

A combination of tropospheric warming and stratospheric cooling is a commonly-cited “fingerprint” of anthropogenic warming. Stratospheric warming since 2000 coincides with continued surface and tropospheric warming, a pattern that is not found in climate model simulations and is not apparently consistent with the anthropogenic fingerprint.

5.6 Snow cover mismatch

Data compiled by the Rutgers University SnowLab (undated) show that Northern Hemisphere winter snow cover is not decreasing (Figure 5.8); ~~if anything~~, it shows an increasing trend.

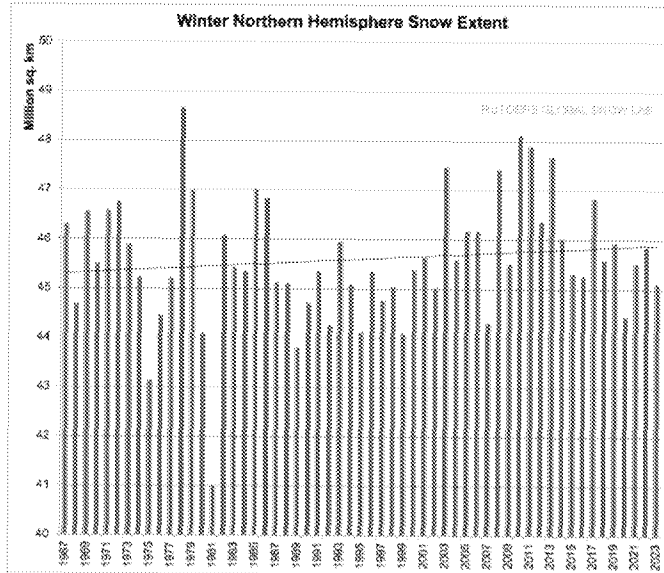


Figure 5.8: Northern Hemisphere Winter Snow extent.

Source: [[HYPERLINK](https://climate.nyu.edu/snowcover/chart_seasonal.php?ui_set=nhl&ui_season=1)

"https://climate.nyu.edu/snowcover/chart_seasonal.php?ui_set=nhl&ui_season=1"] (February 24, 2024)

Yet models project declining Northern Hemisphere snow cover due to climate warming, as described by Connolly *et al.* (2019).

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0"

The climate models were found to poorly explain the observed trends [in Northern Hemisphere snow cover]. While the models suggest snow cover should have steadily decreased for all four seasons, only spring and summer exhibited a long-term decrease, and the pattern of the observed decreases for these seasons was quite different from the modelled predictions. Moreover, the observed trends for autumn and winter suggest a long-term increase, although these trends were not statistically significant.

AR6 largely confines its discussion of changing Northern Hemisphere snow cover extent (SCE) to the Spring season, for which models and observations agree on a downward trend. Regarding Winter changes it remarks as follows (AR6 WGI Ch. 2 p. 344):

Assessment of SCE trends in the NH since 1978 indicates that for the October to February period there is substantial uncertainty in trends with the sign dependent on the observational product. Analysis using the NOAA Climate Data Record shows an increase in October to February SCE

(Hernández-Henríquez *et al.*, 2015; Kunkel *et al.*, 2016) while analyses based on satellite borne optical sensors (Hori *et al.*, 2017) or multi-observation products (Mudryk *et al.*, 2020) show a negative trend for all seasons.

AR6 WGI Chapter 9 (p. 1284) points out that the NOAA Climate Data Record showing increased fall and winter SCE is inconsistent with land-based observations and model-based data sets. It notes that using optical satellite imagery to infer SCE in winter is challenging due to cloud cover and decreased solar illumination in winter months. **BOTTOM LINE?**

Formatted: Highlight

Focusing on the Pacific Coast states (CA, OR and WA) cold season mountain snowfall that melts in spring and summer provides a substantial portion of warm season water resources. A comprehensive reconstruction of snowfall for the main source regions (Cascades and Sierra Nevada Mountains) indicates no significant trends in annual totals since the late 19th century (Christy 2022).

5.7 Hemispheric symmetry of the planetary albedo

The planetary albedo is the fraction of solar radiation reflected by the Earth back to space. It is an important element of the radiative balance and hence whether the planet will warm or cool over time. An intriguing property of the Earth's albedo is that, on average, the Northern Hemisphere (NH) and Southern Hemisphere (SH) have had nearly the same albedo at least throughout the fifty-year satellite record (Stephens *et al.*, 2015). The planetary albedo is the fraction of solar radiation reflected by the Earth back to space, and is an important component of the radiative balance and hence whether the planet will warm or cool over time. An intriguing property of the Earth's albedo is that, on average, the Northern Hemisphere (NH) and Southern Hemisphere (SH) have had very nearly the same albedo at least throughout the fifty-year satellite record (Stephens *et al.*, 2015). This symmetry is surprising, because the SH has much more ocean than land. Since ocean is less reflective than land, the NH should have higher albedo. Clouds (which are highly reflective) are more common in the NH, and so compensate the surface albedo imbalances of the two hemispheres. Datsis and Stephens (2021) show that this cloud compensation comes from the extra-tropical storm tracks of the SH, which are cloudier than those of the NH. While the mechanism for this hemispheric symmetry is unclear, it likely operates on large temporal and spatial scales.

The hemispheric symmetry of the albedo is a simple gross metric for climate models. Rugenstein and Hakuba (2023) defined that metric as the difference between the NH and SH annual mean albedos, expressed as Wm^{-2} of the reflected sunlight, and compiled it for the CMIP6 climate models, as shown in Figure 5.9. Most of the CMIP6 models do not reproduce the small observed asymmetry (about 0.1 Wm^{-2}) and even disagree as to which hemisphere is more reflective. Moreover, the magnitude of the asymmetry ranges up to 5 Wm^{-2} in some models, twice as large as the current anthropogenic forcing (about 2.5 Wm^{-2}).

The significance of unphysical albedo asymmetries in the climate models is not yet fully known. However, other model studies suggest that interhemispheric changes in albedo can alter poleward heat fluxes, meridional temperature gradients, storminess, and differences in hemispheric ocean heat storage. The discrepancy between models and observations further raises issues regarding cloud feedback processes and so more generally diminishes confidence in model projections of the future climate.

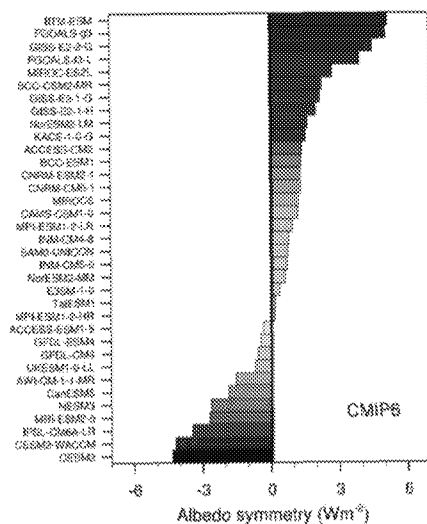


Figure 5.9. Differences in 20-year average reflectivity (albedo) between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres for CMIP6 models used in the most recent IPCC assessment (colored bars). The very small observed difference is indicated by the vertical black line. From Rugenstein and Hakuba (2023).

5.8 US Corn Belt

One of the largest discrepancies between models and observations is in the U.S. Corn Belt, a region of particular importance to global food production. Figure 5.10 shows the warming trends for summertime (June, July, August) for the 12-state Corn Belt (IN, IA, NEIL, ND, SD, MO, MN, WI, MI, OH, KS, NE) during 1973-2022. All 36 climate models (red) warm far too rapidly compared to observations (blue).

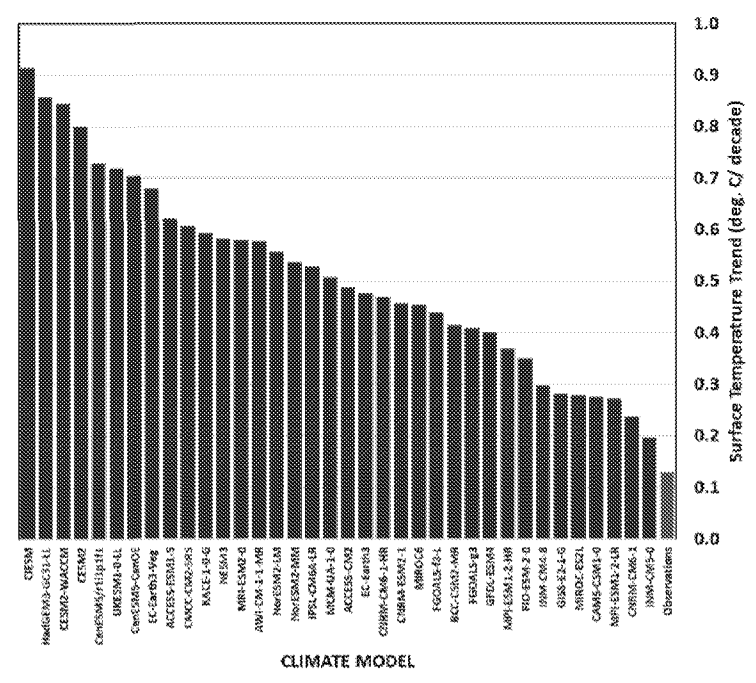


Figure 5.10: Modeled versus observed warming trends in the US corn belt.

As discussed in Chapter 10, the anticipated negative effects of increasing temperatures on U.S. corn yields have not materialized, in contrast to widely publicized studies proclaiming that theoretical future impacts are already being experienced (e.g. Seager *et al.*, 2018).

The IPCC acknowledges limitations in the accuracy of regional climate model outputs. This example shows that users need to assess model projections carefully on a case-by-case basis since local biases may be sufficiently large that the models are simply not fit for purpose. As has recently been noted by two leaders of the modeling community (emphasis added)

... for many key applications that require regional climate model output or for assessing large-scale changes from smallscale processes, we believe that **the current generation of models is not fit for purpose.** (Palmer and Stevens 2019)

To summarize:

- Climate models show warming biases in many aspects of their reproduction of the past few decades
- They produce too much warming at the surface (except in the models with lowest ECS), too much warming in the lower-and mid-troposphere and too much amplification of warming aloft

- They also produce too much stratospheric cooling, too much snow loss, and too much warming in the corn belt.
- The hemispheric albedo difference in individual climate models ranges widely in sign and magnitude compared to observations. The range in Watts/m² is three times larger than the direct anthropogenic forcing of CO₂.
- The IPCC has acknowledged some of these issues but not others.

Formatted: Superscript

References

- Christy, J. R., R. T. McNider (2017). Satellite bulk tropospheric temperatures as a metric for climate sensitivity. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Atmospheric Sciences* 53, 511-518. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1007/s13143-017-0070-z"]
- Christy, J. R. (2022). Time series construction of Oregon and Washington snowfall since 1890 and an update of California snowfall through 2020. *Journal of Hydrometeorology* 23, 1845-1860. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1175/JHM-D-21-0178.1"]
- Connolly, R., M. Connolly, W. Soon, ~~et al.~~ (2019). Northern Hemisphere snow-cover trends (1967–2018): A comparison between climate models and observations. *Geosciences* 9, 135. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.3390/geosciences9030135"]
- Datseris, G., B. Stevens (2021). Earth's albedo and its symmetry. *AGU Advances* 2, e2021AV000440. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1029/2021AV000440"]
- Karl, T.R., S. J. Hassol, C. D. Miller, W. L. Murray, eds. (2006). Temperature Trends in the Lower Atmosphere: Steps for Understanding and Reconciling Differences. U.S. Climate Change Science Program/Subcommittee on Global Change Research. [HYPERLINK "https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc12017/m2/1/high_res_d/sap1-1-final-all.pdf"]
- Klotzbach, P.J., R. A. Pielke, Sr., R. A. Pielke, Jr., J. R. Christy, R. T. McNider (2009). An alternative explanation for differential temperature trends at the surface and in the lower troposphere. *Journal of Geophysical Research — Atmospheres* 114(D21). [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1029/2009JD011841"]
- McKittrick, R., J. R. Christy (2020). Pervasive warming bias in CMIP6 tropospheric layers. *Earth and Space Science* 7. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1029/2020EA001281"]
- Palmer, T., and B. Stevens (2019). The scientific challenge of understanding and estimating climate change. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116(49), 24390–24395. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1906691116"]
- Philipona, R., C. Mears, M. Fujiwara, ~~et al.~~ (2018). Radiosondes show that after decades of cooling, the lower stratosphere is now warming. *Journal of Geophysical Research — Atmospheres* 123. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1029/2018JD028901"]
- Rugenstein, M., and M. Hakuba (2023). Connecting hemispheric asymmetries of planetary albedo and surface temperature. *Geophysical Research Letters* 50, e2022GL101802. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1029/2022GL101802"]
- Scaffeta, N (2023) CMIP6 GCM ensemble members versus global surface temperatures. *Climate Dynamics* 60, 3091–3120 (2023). [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-022-06493-w"]
- Seafetta, N. (2022). Advanced testing of low, medium, and high ECS CMIP6 GCM simulations versus ERA5 T2m. *Geophysical Research Letters* 49(6), e2022GL097716.

Formatted: Space After: 0 pt

- [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2022GL097716>"]
- Seager, R., J. Feldman, N. Lis, ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2017). Whither the 100th meridian? The once and future physical and human geography of America's arid-humid divide. Part II: The meridian moves east. *Earth Interactions* 22. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/EI-D-17-0012.1>"]
- Spencer, R. W. (2024). Global warming: Observations vs. climate models. Environment Backgrounder, The Heritage Foundation.
[HYPERLINK "<https://www.heritage.org/environment/report/global-warming-observations-vs-climate-models>"]
- Stephens, G. L., D. O'Brien, P.J. Webster ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2015). The albedo of Earth. *Reviews of Geophysics*. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1002/2014RG000449>"]
- Vogelsang, T. and N. Nawaz (2016). Estimation and inference of linear trend slope ratios with an application to global temperature data: *Journal of Time Series Analysis* 38. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsa.12209>"]

6 EXTREME WEATHER

Chapter Summary

Most types of extreme weather exhibit no statistically significant long-term trends over the available historical record. While there has been an increase in hot days in the US since the 1950s, a point emphasized by the IPCC AR6, numbers are still low relative to the 1920s and 1930s. Extreme convective storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and droughts exhibit considerable natural variability but long-term increases are not detected. Some increases in extreme precipitation events can be detected in some regions over short intervals but the trends do not persist over long periods and at the regional scale ~~the trends do not persist~~. Wildfires are not more common in the US than they were in the 1980s. Burned area increased from the 1960s to the early 2000's, however it is low compared to the estimated natural baseline level. US wildfire activity is strongly affected by forest management practices.

6.1 Introduction

High impact weather extremes, usually related to temperature, precipitation and/or high wind, can disrupt infrastructure and therefore endanger human health and wellbeing. The issue is not whether extremes occur. Rather, it is whether there are long-term (decadal scale) changes in the frequency or character of extremes (“detection”), as well as the extent to which such changes and the attendant changes in hazards are caused by anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases (“attribution”; e.g., IPCC AR6 Seneviratne *et al.* 2021).

It is naïve to assume that any recent extreme event is caused by human influences on the climate. Climate is about the statistical properties of weather over decades, not single events. Further, there are only about 130 years of reliable observational records that can be analyzed statistically. That brief interval does not begin to contain all the extreme events that the climate system can create on its own. Over geologic time the climate system has generated an (essentially) infinite variety of weather patterns and extremes that humans have never observed and thus are absent from the databases used to determine extreme statistics [see *Perils of short data records* below]. For that reason, attributing an extreme event unprecedented in the record requires assumptions about the magnitude of natural variations.

This chapter is concerned with detection of trends in extreme weather, while Chapter 8 considers causal attribution, with Section 8.4 specifically addressing extreme weather. If no trend is detected, then clearly there is no basis for attribution. But even where a trend is observed, attribution to human-caused warming should not be assumed to follow.

This is especially true for precipitation events. The hydrological literature has long noted the phenomenon of *Long-Term Persistence* (LTP) in rainfall data (Hurst 1951, Cohn and Lins 2005, Markonis and Koutsoyiannis 2016). LTP has a formal mathematical definition, but it can be thought of as the presence of natural variations with strong autocorrelations that result in cycle-like behavior on long time scales. The presence of LTP requires long records to accurately estimate variability. Analysis of records that are short relative to the LTP scale will tend to underestimate variability, therefore overstating the significance of apparent trends and underestimating the likelihood of extreme events (Cohn and Lins 2005).

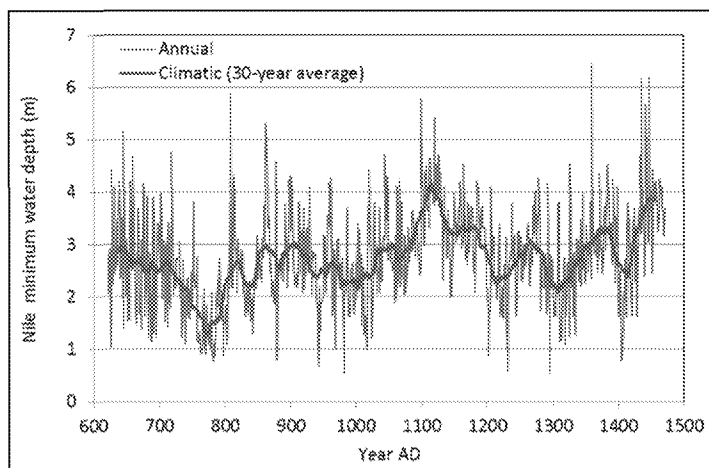


Figure 6.1.1: The annual minimum depth of the Nile River near Cairo over more than 650 years from 622 to 1284 A.D. The data, measured in meters, shows a characteristic pattern of year-to-year fluctuations around longer-term trends. Data from Koutsoyiannis (2013)

A good example of LTP is the eight-century long record of the annual minimum height of the Nile River observed at Roda Island in Cairo shown in Figure 6.1.1. Since human influences on the global climate were negligible before the 20th century, the century-scale variability of the thirty-year average is entirely natural; Egyptians of the seventh and eighth centuries would have been incorrect to assume that the worsening drought during that time was the “new normal.”

With these caveats in mind, we examine the evidence for changes in selected weather and climate extremes. An emergent theme is the wide gap between public perceptions and scientific evidence. It has become routine in media coverage, government and private sector discussions, and even in some academic literature to make generalized assertions that extreme weather of all types is getting worse due to GHGs and “climate change.” Yet expert assessments typically have not drawn such sweeping conclusions and instead have emphasized the difficulty both of identifying specific trends and establishing a causal connection with anthropogenic forcing.

In the sections to follow we provide excerpts from various IPCC and NCA assessment reports denoting the sources as follows:

SREX: The IPCC Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation (2012)

AR6: The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report Working Group 1 (2021).

NCA4: The US Climate Science Special Report of the Fourth National Climate Assessment (2017) Volume I.

NCA5: The US Climate Science Special Report of the Fifth National Climate Assessment (2023) Volume I.

Note that in the excerpts, *italics* are in the original whereas **boldface** emphasis has been added.

Additionally we present updated data series from standard government sources to provide up-to-date information through 2024 wherever possible.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0"

6.2 Hurricanes and tropical cyclones

The AR6 provides the following assessment of tropical cyclones (TCs; used here as a synonym for hurricanes):

AR6: There is *low confidence* in most reported long-term (multidecadal to centennial) trends in TC frequency or intensity-based metrics due to changes in the technology used to collect the best-track data. (IPCC, 2021)

AR6: It is *likely* that the global proportion of major (Category 3–5) tropical cyclone occurrence has increased over the last four decades . . . There is *low confidence* in long-term (multi-decadal to centennial) trends in the frequency of all-category tropical cyclones. (IPCC, 2023)

AR6: A subset of the best-track data corresponding to hurricanes that have directly impacted the United States since 1900 is considered to be reliable, and shows **no trend in the frequency of U.S. landfall events**.

Since 1980, when satellite observations fully covered the global oceans, we have confidence in the numbers of total global hurricanes and major hurricanes (Category 3 and higher). Figure 6.2.1 shows that on average, each year there are about 50 hurricanes, with about 25 reaching major hurricane status (Maue, 2025). There is substantial year-to-year and decadal variability a weak decreasing trend in the number of hurricanes and a slight but insignificant increasing trend in the number of major hurricanes. These two trends combine to create an increasing trend in proportion of major hurricanes.

Global hurricane statistics are dominated by the Northwest Pacific Ocean, which accounts for ~35 percent of total global hurricanes, whereas the Atlantic accounts for ~15 percent of global hurricanes (Colorado State University, 2025). Data in the Atlantic basin extends further back than in the other ocean basins, and is most relevant to U.S. policy makers.

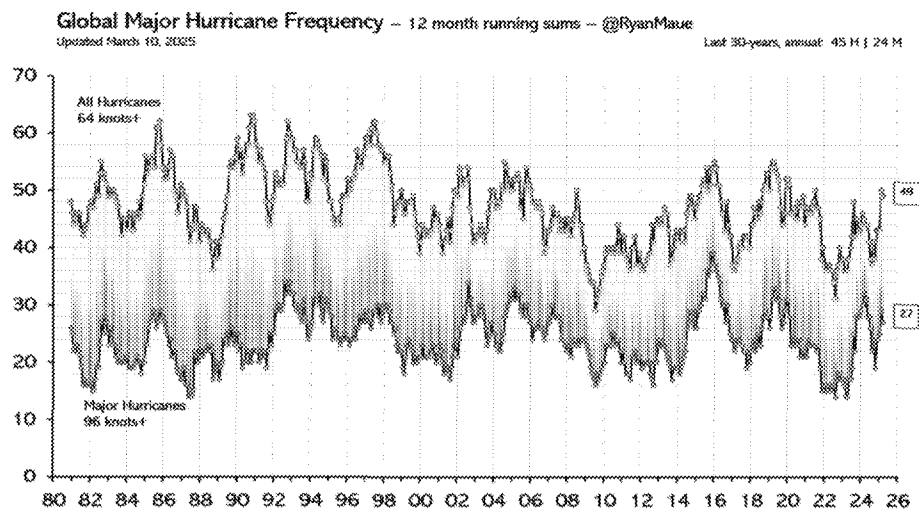


Figure 6.2.1: Global frequency of hurricanes and major hurricanes since 1980.

Figure 6.2.2 shows the frequency of Atlantic hurricanes and major hurricanes (Category 3 and higher) back to 1920. Data prior to 1965 (the onset of satellite observations in the Atlantic, shaded in blue) shows some undercounting, with data prior to 1920 showing substantial undercounting (Vecchi and Knutson, 2011). All measures of Atlantic hurricane activity show a significant increase since 1970. However, the period from 1971-1994 was a period of low exceptionally low activity, with high values of hurricane activity (comparable to the past two decades, even with undercounting) also observed during the 1950's and 1960's, and even in the 1930's.

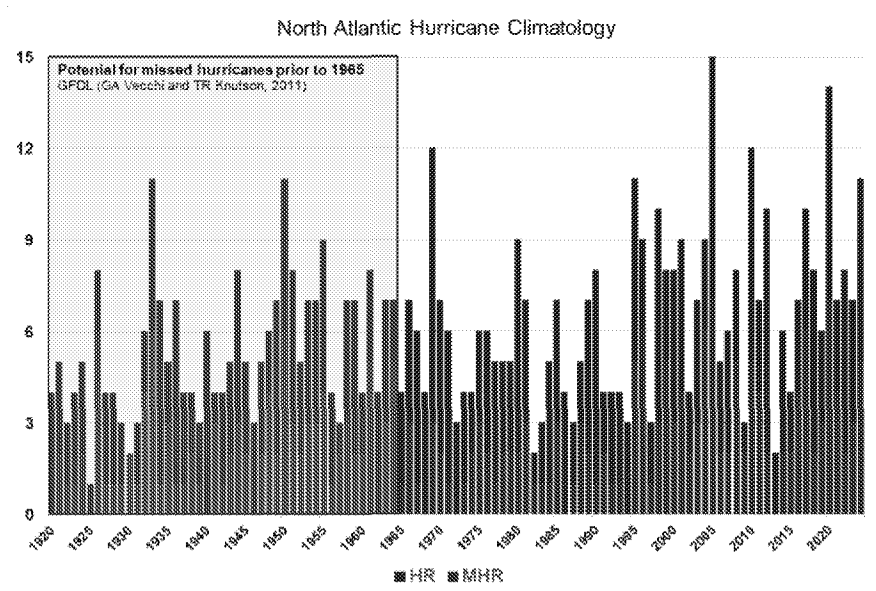


Figure 6.2.2: Atlantic frequency of hurricanes (HR) and major hurricanes (MHR) since 1920. Source: National Hurricane Center (2024)

Figure 6.2.2 shows that Atlantic hurricanes vary strongly on decadal and multidecadal time scales. These variations are associated primarily with the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation (AMO), which is manifest in basin-wide sea surface temperature and sea level pressure fluctuations connected to large scale ocean circulation patterns. The AMO was in its warm phase during 1926-1970 and 1995-present, but in its cool phase during 1971-1994. It has its greatest impact on the number of major hurricanes (Category 3+), identified by Goldenberg et al. (2001) as associated with above normal SSTs and decreased vertical shear in the AMO warm phase (see also Bell and Chelliah, 2006; Klotzbach et al., 2018).

Klotzbach et al. (2018) conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the landfalling hurricane data for the Continental U.S. since 1900. Figure 6.3.3 updates their analysis through 2024. While the largest numbers of landfalling hurricanes are from 2004, 2005 and 2020, there is no statistically significant trend since 1920. Figure 6.2.3 also shows the time series for major hurricane landfalls (Category 3-5). The largest year in the record is 2005, with 4 major hurricane landfalls. However, there were no major hurricanes striking the U.S. from 2006 through 2016, the longest such period since 1920. Figure 6.2.2 shows that Atlantic hurricanes vary strongly on decadal and multidecadal time scales. These variations are associated primarily with the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation (AMO), which is manifest in basin-wide sea surface temperature and sea level pressure fluctuations connected to large scale ocean circulation patterns. The AMO was in its warm phase during 1926-1970 and 1995-present, but in its cool phase during 1971-1994. The AMO has its greatest impact on the number of major hurricanes (Category 3+) identified by Goldenberg et al. (2001) to be associated with above normal SSTs and decreased vertical shear in the AMO warm phase (see also Bell and Chelliah, 2006; Klotzbach et al., 2018).

Klotzbach et al. (2018) conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the landfalling hurricane data for the Continental U.S. since 1900. Figure 6.3.3 updates their analysis through 2024. While the largest numbers

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0"

of hurricanes are from 2004, 2005 and 2020, there is no statistically significant trend since 1920. Figure 6.2.3 also shows the time series for major hurricane landfalls (Category 3–5). The largest year in the record is 2005, with 4 major hurricane landfalls. However, there were no major hurricanes striking the U.S from 2006 through 2016, the longest such period since 1920.

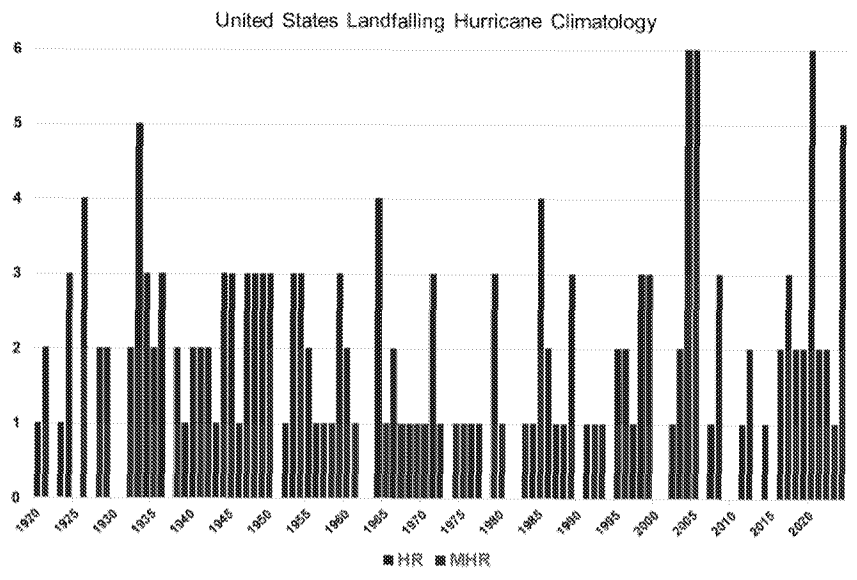


Figure 6.2.3: US landfalling frequency of hurricanes (HR) and major hurricanes (MHR) since 1920. Source NOAA HRD(a) (2024)

Figure 6.2.3 shows substantial interannual to multidecadal variability in U.S. landfall activity. Klotzbach et al. (2018) examined how the landfall counts vary with ENSO (El Niño versus La Niña) and the warm versus cold phases of the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation (AMO).

Villarini et al. (2012) provide an analysis of U.S. hurricane landfalls back to 1878. While it is possible that some landfalls were missed in the late 19th century owing to sparsely populated regions on the Gulf Coast, it is remarkable that the highest year in the entire record is 1886, with 7 landfalls, when human influences on the climate were much smaller than they are today.

Substantial interannual to multidecadal variability in U.S. landfall activity is seen Figure 6.2.3. Klotzbach et al. (2018) examined how the landfall counts vary with ENSO (El Niño versus La Niña) and the warm versus cold phases of the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation (AMO).

Villarini et al. (2012) provide an analysis of U.S. hurricane landfalls back to 1878. While it is possible that some landfalls were missed in the late 19th century owing to sparsely populated regions on the Gulf Coast, it is remarkable that the highest year in the entire record, is 1886, with 7 landfalls.

Table 6.2.1 shows the 10 strongest hurricanes (plus ties) to make U.S. landfall. Of the hurricanes that have made landfall with sustained winds greater than 150 mph, only one has occurred in the 21st century.

In summary, analyses of both global and regional variability and trends of hurricane activity provide the basis for detecting changes and understanding their causes. The relatively short historical record of hurricane activity, and the even shorter record from the satellite era, is not sufficient to assess whether recent hurricane activity is unusual relative to the background natural variability. Atlantic hurricane processes are influenced substantially by the natural modes of ocean circulation variability in the Atlantic, notably the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation. While it has long been hypothesized that a rising global sea surface temperature would cause an increase in hurricane intensity, identification of any significant trend in the hurricane data is hampered by a short data record and substantial natural variability.

Rank	Year	Landfall Wind (MPH)	Name
1	1935	185	"Labor Day"
2	1969	175	Camille
3	1992	165	Andrew
4	2018	160	Michael
5	1856	150	"Last Island"
5	1886	150	"Indianola"
5	1919	150	-----
5	1932	150	"Freeport"
5	2004	150	Charley
5	2020	150	Laura
5	2021	150	Ida
5	2022	150	Ian

Table 6.2.1 Strongest hurricanes to make landfall along the US coast. Source (NOAA HRD(b), 2024)

6.3 Temperature extremes

The AR6 assessment focused on the period after 1950 and reported increasing trends in heatwave frequency and intensity. However, the NCA4 noted that heatwave activity in the US reached a peak in the 1930s.

AR6: It is *virtually certain* that hot extremes (including heatwaves) have become **more frequent** and **more intense** across most land regions since the 1950s, while cold extremes (including cold waves) have become less frequent and less severe (SPM, A3.1)

AR6: In North America, there is very robust evidence for a *very likely* increase in the intensity and frequency of hot extremes and decrease in the intensity and frequency of cold extremes for the whole continent, though there are substantial spatial and seasonal variations in the trends. Minimum temperatures display warming consistently across the continent, while there are more

contrasting trends in the annual maximum daily temperatures in parts of the USA. (Chapter 11, p 1550)

NCA4: Changes in warm extremes are more nuanced than changes in cold extremes. For instance, the warmest daily temperature of the year **increased** in some parts of the West over the past century, but there were **decreases** in almost all locations east of the Rocky Mountains. In fact, all eastern regions experienced a net **decrease**, most notably the Midwest (about 2.2°F [1.2°C]) and the Southeast (roughly 1.5°F [0.8°C]). (pp. 190-191)

NCA4: Since the mid-1960s, there has been only a very slight increase in the warmest daily temperature of the year (amidst large interannual variability). Heat waves (6-day periods with a maximum temperature above the 90th percentile for 1961–1990) increased in frequency until the mid-1930s, became considerably less common through the mid-1960s, and increased in frequency again thereafter. As with warm daily temperatures, **heat wave magnitude reached a maximum in the 1930s.** (pp. 190-191)

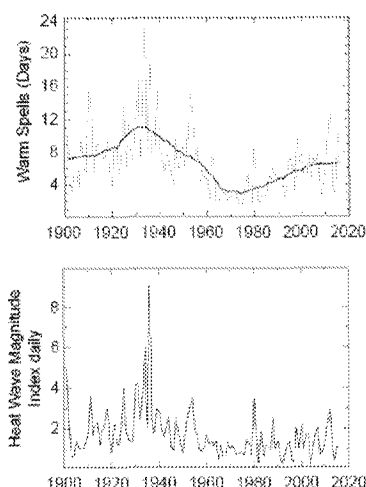


Figure 6.3.1: US Heat waves since 1900. Source: NCA4 Figure 6.4

6.3.1 Temperatures in the US are becoming less extreme

Daily maximum temperatures in the warm season (T max, May-Sep) and daily minimum temperatures in the cold season (T min, Dec-Mar) are available beginning in Dec 1898 (126 years). The dataset consists of 1,211 CONUS stations designated as United States Historical Climate Network or USHCN stations (see Figure 6.3.2; Quinlan *et al.* 1987, Karl *et al.* 1990). These stations were selected by NOAA as having the fewest problematic issues with gaps, station moves and instrument changes. Where gaps still exist, nearby stations (bias-corrected) were merged so that the median volume of data available for a station is 98%. Although there are certainly errors in the dataset, with over 1,000 stations we can have relatively high confidence in any underlying signal that might be discovered.

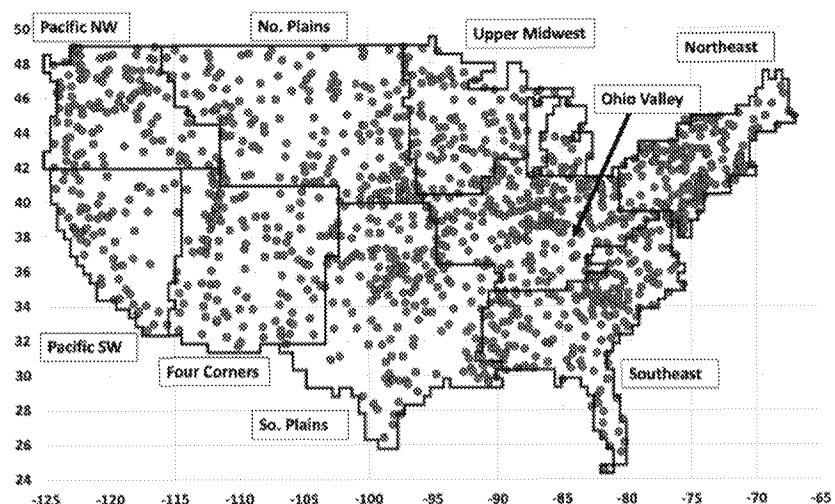


Figure 6.3.2 Locations of USHCN temperature stations. Source: USHCN.

We begin with the question of whether the occurrence of daily record high or low temperatures has changed since Dec 1898. Each warm-season has 153 days (1 May to 30 Sep) and each cold-season has 122 days (1 Dec to 31 Mar). For each station and day, we calculated the year in which the record highest (lowest) temperature occurred. With 126 years of observations, if there were no temperature trends over time, the expected number of records for Tmax would be 1.21 ($=153/126$) per station per year and for Tmin 0.96 ($=122/126$) per station per year.

Figure 6.3.3 shows the observed distribution in time of the occurrence of these extreme events. There is a common feature in many metrics of warm-season extremes in the CONUS - the exceptional heat of the 1920s and especially the 1930s, peaking in 1936. On a per-station average, 60% of the Tmax records and 59% of the Tmin records occurred in the first half of the period (1899-1961).

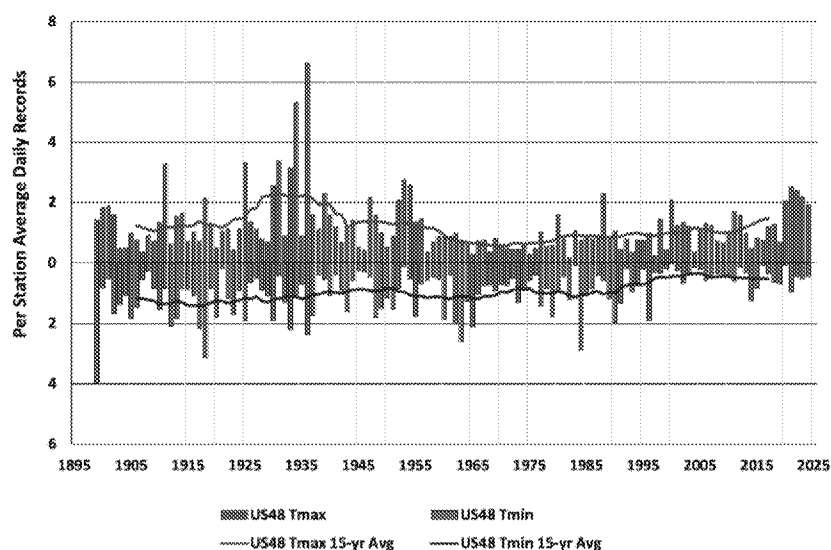


Figure 6.3.3 Number of daily record High (red) and Low (blue) temperatures for warm and cold seasons in the CONUS. The lines represent the 15-year running, centered average. Source: 1,211 USHCN stations supplemented as needed to achieve a minimum of 92% of observations in the 126-year period since Dec 1898. US48: contiguous US states. Tmax: maximum temperature. Tmin: minimum temperature.

On the cold side, the Valentine's Day Arctic outbreak in Feb 1899 stands as the most extensive cold extreme experienced by the CONUS, with 1917 in 2nd place. The frequency of cold records has declined, especially over the last quarter of the period in which only 13% of the extreme cold events were measured. In contrast, 25% of the extreme Tmax records were achieved in the last quarter, in accordance with statistical expectations. These general features have been noted in past assessments (see above, IPCC AR6, NCA4). Combining the two records the overall reduction in numbers of both cold and hot extremes over the past century indicates a climate less prone to extremes.

This pattern is also shown in Figure 6.3.4. For each station and for each year the hottest warm season and coldest cold-season temperatures were calculated. Then the differences between these were computed by station and geographically-averaged over all stations, thus yielding an annual measure of the expected range of local extreme temperatures for each year. Figure 6.3.4 shows the 15-year trailing average of this measure, which has clearly declined over the past century.

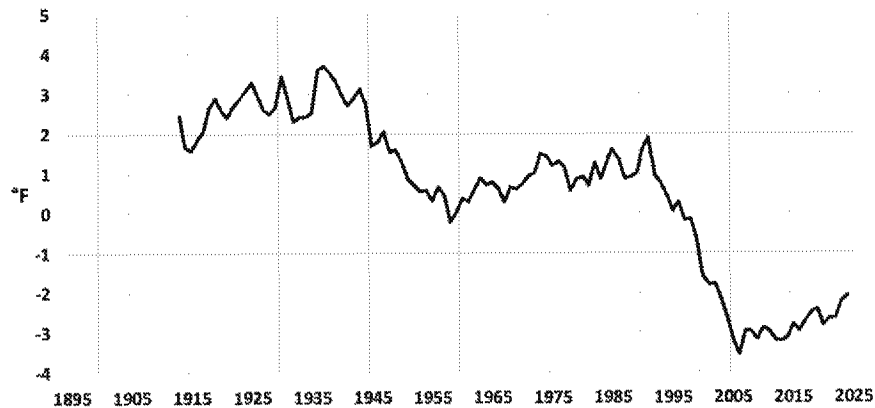


Figure 6.3.4. 15-year trailing average of the difference each year of each station's hottest warm-season Tmax and coldest cold-season Tmin relative to the long-term average. Source: [Author analysis of USHCN, author calculations data](#).

The average difference for each station between the hottest summer Tmax and coldest winter Tmin has declined by about 5°F in the past 126 years. The decline is due mostly to warmer winter Tmin, but a decline in summer Tmax is also a factor. The rise in Tmin has been strongly related to the growing presence of manufactured surfaces around the weather stations over the last 100+ years (the so-called urban heat island effect; Spencer *et al.* 2025).

In summary, while temperature extremes are regularly experienced in the U.S. and attract a great deal of media attention, long term records show the US climate has become less extreme over time (milder) when measured by the range between warm season maxima and cold season minima.

6.3.2 Exceedances of a heat threshold

Under the heading of “The Risk of Temperature Extremes is Changing”, the most recent US National Climate Assessment report (NCA5) notes the increase in a threshold metric of number of days at or above 95°F, stating,

The western US has been particularly affected by extreme heat since the 1980s ..., experiencing a larger increase in days over 95°F, as would be expected given the greater warming in that region relative to the eastern US. Several major heatwaves have affected the US since 2018, including a record-shattering event in the Pacific Northwest in 2021.

Are the occurrences of 95°F days changing? In a climate as varied as that of CONUS, threshold statistics can be misleading. A region with many stations that have near 95°F Tmax average temperatures in the summer might see large swings in the metric when only small changes in average temperature occur. Elsewhere with stations that either rarely or virtually always achieve 95°F Tmax temperatures, a small change will not have much impact on the results.

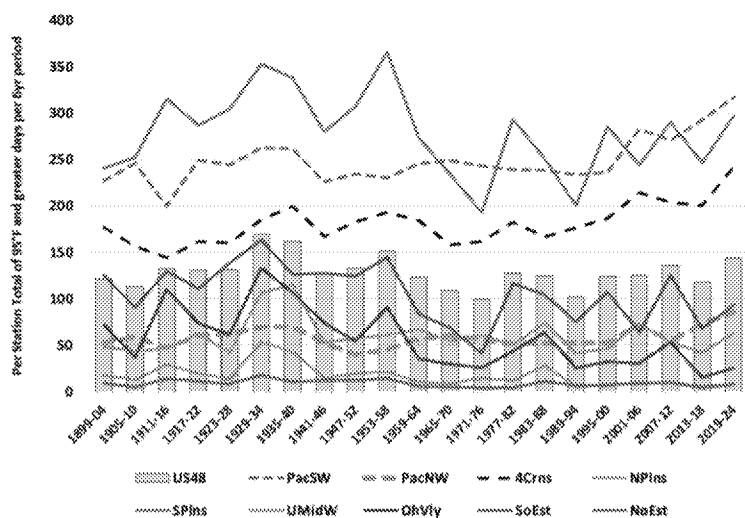


Figure 6.3.5. Total number of days $\geq 95^{\circ}\text{F}$ in 6-yr periods, US 48 (bars) and regions (lines). A 6-year period is used as this evenly divides the 126-year record. US48: contiguous US states. See Figure 6.3.2 for region names. Source: Author analysis of USHCN data. Total number of days $\geq 95^{\circ}\text{F}$ in 6-yr periods, US 48 (bars) and regions (lines). Interval is 6 years as this is divisible into 126. Source: USHCN, author calculations. US48: contiguous US states. See Figure 6.3.2 for region names.

In the past 126 years, the average CONUS station experienced 129 days exceeding 95°C per 6-yr period, but the regional values range from 278 in the Southern Plains to 9 in the Northeast. Thus, such threshold analyses must be interpreted with caution. Figure 6.3.5 shows that only three of the nine regions, all in the West, have experienced upward trends in the number of 95°F or hotter days (dashed lines). The CONUS as a whole has not, and the other six regions have experienced declines.

The Pacific NW heatwave of 2021 referenced in the NCA5 quote will be examined more closely in Section 8.6.1. The evidence indicates that it was a single, unprecedented event in the record, not part of a pattern of increasing extreme heat. For example, the 5-day average tropospheric grid-point temperature anomaly over the Pacific NW during that event was $+10.8^{\circ}\text{C}$, the most extreme Northern Hemisphere grid point summer anomaly in the 46 years from over 4 million grid values. In contrast, the global temperature anomaly during that time was virtually zero ($+0.03^{\circ}\text{C}$, Mass et al. *et al.* 2024).

The NCA5 heading “The Risk of Temperature Extremes is Changing” suggests pervasive positive trends are now being observed in threshold temperatures, but that is not evident in the figures above.

6.3.3 Heatwaves

Heatwaves (consecutive days that exceed an extreme threshold) have a greater societal impact than a single daily record temperature. We measure “Heatwave Days” here as the count of all days in May-Sep each year that exceed the 90th percentile for that day and that lie within a period of at least six consecutive days. This is equivalent to the method used in NCA4, except that the reference period here is the entire record 1899-2024 while NCA4 truncated the reference period to 1961-1990, which was a cool period. That

truncation boosts positive results (days exceeding the 90th percentile) in periods warmer than the reference period, especially starting in 1960 and moving to the present (see *Urban Influences* below).

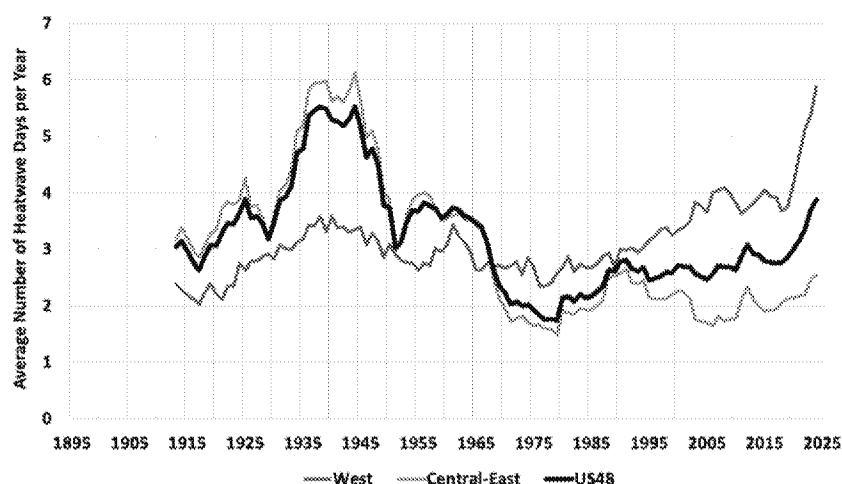


Figure 6.3.6 15-year trailing average of number of heatwave days per year per station in the CONUS (blackline) and two regions: West (red), Central-east (green).

Figure 6.3.6 indicates that there are regional variations in heatwave activity. The excessive heat of the first half of the 20th century occurred primarily in the eastern two-thirds of the nation, while the West has seen a recent increase of heatwave days (NCA5). This indicates that the background warm season circulation favored heatwaves in the eastern portions of the country in the first half of the 20th century, but in the 21st century the patterns have favored heatwaves in the West. For CONUS as a whole, heatwaves are no more common today than they were a century ago, consistent with the upper panel of our Figure 6.4.1 taken from NCA4.

This metric varies significantly with region. The four northern regions (Pacific NW, Northern Plains, Upper Midwest, and Northeast) on average experience 15 to 27 heatwave days per 15-year period. In contrast, the five southern regions (Pacific Southwest, 4-Corners, Southern Plains, Ohio Valley and Southeast) see 37 to 54 such days, essentially twice as many. This suggests the summer circulation pattern is more prone to stationary events in the southern regions while transient systems in the northern regions are more common and thus cut short these potentially longer events.

The analysis of heatwaves is an example of why it is important to consider complete datasets and appropriate metrics. The NCA5 directs readers to the website [[HYPERLINK "https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves"](https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves)] (USGCRP 2023) to view a figure showing the number of urban heatwaves by decade from the 1960s, which we reproduce as Figure 6.3.7.

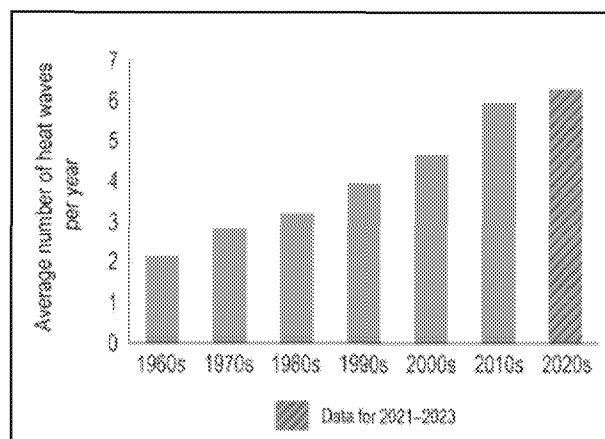


Figure 6.3.7: Average number of urban heatwaves per year for 50 large U.S. metropolitan areas
From [HYPERLINK "<https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves>"]

The figure shows a monotonic increase in each decade from 2 occurrences per year in the 1960s to 6 in the 2020s. The definition of a heatwave used is an unusual but practical measure of human discomfort - a period of at least 2 consecutive days when the *minimum* apparent temperature (combination of temperature and humidity) exceeds the 85th percentile. Note too, the dataset is limited to the 50 largest U.S. cities.

Given the unusual heatwave definition and urban focus, these increasing values since 1960 presented in USGCRP (2023) are not informative about long term trends or the influence of GHG emissions for at least two reasons. First, as shown in Figures 6.3.1 and 6.3.6, the 1960s was the coldest decade and 1970s the second coldest decade since the 1910's, so this starting date preconditions the time series to show increases. Second, post-1960 urbanization in these cities is a major factor in the rise of T_{min} relative to co-located T_{max} and relative to T_{min} at nearby rural stations. This does not dismiss the real rise in nighttime temperatures in major U. S. cities and the societal impacts associated with these changes. However, we note for a variety of reasons, that summer T_{max} (especially in rural areas) is a better metric for detecting changes in heatwaves influenced by changes in the background climate due, for example, to increasing GHGs (Christy *et al.*, 2009). For the CONUS as a whole, the evidence in this section suggests GHG emissions have had little-to-no effect on heatwaves.

6.4 Extreme precipitation

The IPCC AR6 assessed that an increase in heavy precipitation has been observed in data starting in the 1950s.

AR6: The frequency and intensity of **heavy precipitation events have increased** since the 1950s over most land area for which observational data are sufficient for trend analysis (high confidence). (SPM A3.2)

AR6: In North America, there is robust evidence that the **magnitude and intensity of extreme precipitation has very likely increased** since the 1950s. Both [one-day maxima] and [5-day maxima] have significantly increased in North America during 1950-2018. (Chapter 11, p. 1560)

The US National Climate Assessments (NCA4, NCA5) have highlighted an increase in the occurrence of the heaviest precipitation events (defined in different ways) primarily in the eastern half of the CONUS, especially the Northeast, when starting the analysis in either 1901 or 1958. Interestingly, the regional variations indicate that the largest increases in extreme precipitation events are in the Northeast and the smallest in the West, a pattern counter to the changes in temperature extremes.

McKittrick and Christy (2019) examined long-term and consistent station observations of extreme daily precipitation to test some of these NCA claims for the Southeast and West Coast using a trend model with a non-parametric variance estimator robust to the complex autocorrelation properties of precipitation data. When the time series were extended back in time (as far as 1872 in some cases) or when starting later (1978), there were no significant trends for either region.

These findings have been updated for this report (McKittrick and Christy 2025) with similarly constructed observations from 29 stations on the CONUS Pacific Coast (1893ff from San Diego CA to Blaine WA) and 24 stations in the humid Southeast (1872ff from Austin TX to Washington DC), also adding 27 stations in the Northeast (1888ff from Buffalo NY to Eastport ME). The locations are shown in Figure 6.4.1. The stations were selected ~~on the basis of~~ based on availability of long-term high-quality records. The regions are each associated with important features of extreme precipitation behavior: ~~The~~ the Pacific coast is associated with landfalling atmospheric rivers for which AR6 cites evidence of increasing activity since 1948 with further increases expected as the world warms (AR6 8.3.2.8.2). ~~The~~ the NCA report ~~has indicated~~ indicates that the Northeast has experienced the greatest increase in extreme events, ~~and~~ the Southeast is also a place noted in the NCAs ~~for as~~ having increased extreme events.

The results of applying the analysis of McKittrick and Christy (2019) were as follows for each region, then followed by further explanation.

Pacific Coast heavy rainfall events

- Average precipitation trend is statistically significant (downwards) in Astoria OR; insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant in Big Sur CA; insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant in Aberdeen WA and Big Sur CA and negative and significant in Newport OR (insignificant elsewhere).
- Averaged over all stations in the region, none of these three trend parameters is statistically significant.

The Pacific Coast receives considerable precipitation from Atmospheric River (AR) events which often last more than a day or two (e.g., Gershunov ~~et al.~~ *et al.* 2017, Pan ~~et al.~~ *et al.* 2024). The worst series of such events in recent history was the so-called ARkStorm that occurred between December 1861 and January 1862; it dumped nearly 10 feet of rain in parts of California and submerged the entire Central Valley for weeks under as much as 15 feet of water (Brewer 1930, Null and Hulbert 2007). Additionally, Paleoclimate research has found six megastorms more severe than 1861–1862 in California during the last 1800 years, occurring at intervals of 300 years or so (Porter ~~et al.~~ *et al.* 2011).



Figure 6.4.1: Locations of precipitation monitoring stations used in this report. Orange: Pacific coast. Blue: Northeast. Green: Southeast.

We examine occurrences of 5-day deluges as follows. Taking the Pacific coast as an example, a 130-year span contains 26 5-year intervals. At each location we computed the 5-day precipitation totals throughout the year and selected the 26 highest values across the sample. A single year may have more than one of the 26 heaviest. Each of those can be thought of as 1-in-5yr events. If there are no trends in precipitation, then the total number of these events across all stations should be evenly spread out over the years. In Fig. 6.4.2 we show the distribution in time of these events for the Pacific coast. The deluges associated with the massive 1997-98 El Niño event are readily apparent. While erratic, as is typical of such precipitation metrics, there is no indication of a tendency to become more frequent over time.

Southeast heavy rainfall events

- The trend in average precipitation is positive and statistically significant in Mobile AL and Quitman GA; ~~and but~~ insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant in Mobile AL ~~but~~, insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant in Vicksburg MS and Norfolk VA; ~~and but~~ insignificant elsewhere.
- Averaged over all stations in the region none of these three trend parameters is statistically significant

Figure 6.4.3 shows the same calculation for the last 150 years in the Southeast humid zone. The temporal pattern of 5-day totals of the 1-in-5yr heavy events is generally unremarkable, though a cluster of higher values appears in 1995 to 2019. The increase in those years is due largely to the 4 northeastern-most stations of Wilmington NC, Weldon NC, Washington DC, and Norfolk VA. This confirms the pattern indicated in NCA4 and NCA5 -- an increasing frequency of heavy events due to a temporal clustering of tropical storms from eastern NC to Maine discussed below. Otherwise, the remaining 20 stations show an unremarkable temporal distribution of heavy events.

BOX: Perils of short data records

San Francisco provides a good case study of the limitation of using short historical samples to characterize natural variability of extreme events. Suppose we use a 130-year sample of daily San Francisco precipitation from 1895 to 2024 and we look for 3-day, 5-day, 14-day and 30-day rainfall records. The results are as shown in Table 7.2.

Event	Record (inches)	Year
3-day	6.94	2023
5-day	8.55	2023
14-day	12.62	2023
30-day	18.93	1998

Table 6.2: Extreme rainfall records, San Francisco, 1895-2024.

The records all cluster in the more recent years, 2023 appears to be an exceptional year and since it is near the end of the sample, it might suggest that the climate has shifted into a more hazardous state, perhaps as a result of human influences. Note: “2023” indicates the event occurred in the water-year of Aug 2022 to Jul 2023.

But the picture is very different if we use a sample that begins 45 years earlier, in 1850. Table 6.3 shows that the record-setting events all happened in the 1860s. Furthermore 2023 is now not even in 2nd place but falls to 3rd or 4th place. And comparing the records of the two charts shows the extreme precipitation events in 1862 and 1867 involved considerably more rainfall than the 1998 and 2023 events, with 14- and 30-day totals about 50 percent higher.

Event	Record (inches)	Year	Rank of 130-yr extreme listed in Table 6.2
3-day	8.85	1867	3
5-day	9.80	1867	3
14-day	19.05	1862	4
30-day	28.25	1862	2

Table 6.3: Extreme rainfall records, San Francisco, 1850-2024.

The range of natural variability is made even more remarkable when paleoclimate evidence is examined. Porter et al. (2011) discovered that in the past 1,800 years at least six megastorms were more intense than the devastating 1861-62 ARkStorm that struck the region. Evidently such extreme events, “unprecedented” in our 1895-2024 sample, have impacted the region about every 300 years though not since 1895.

This example illustrates the limitations of using relatively short climate periods (~130 years) to assess the character and range of natural variability in general and of extreme events in particular. Accurate representation of the full range of natural variability is necessary for any attribution analyses (see 8.6). Infrastructure planners, emergency management institutions and attribution scientists would understand the significant mischaracterization of the magnitude of a future extreme if based only on the last 130 years. In this case, a single time-sample of 130 years provides an underestimation of the extreme value by up to 50% determined when adding only 45 more years of observations. Compared to millennial-scale paleoclimate evidence, an even greater underestimation would occur. An important lesson is that the climate can deliver great surprises on its own, even without human influences.

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.13", Right: 0.11", Border: Top: (No border)

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.13", Right: 0.11"

Formatted Table

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.13", Right: 0.11"

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.13", Right: 0.11"

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.13", Right: 0.11"

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.13", Right: 0.11"

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.13", Right: 0.11"

Formatted Table

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.13", Right: 0.11"

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.13", Right: 0.11"

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.13", Right: 0.11"

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.13", Right: 0.11"

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.13", Right: 0.11"

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.13", Right: 0.11", Border: Bottom: (No border)

BOX: Perils of short data records

San Francisco provides a good case study of the limitation of using short historical samples to characterize natural variability of extreme events. Suppose we use a 130-year sample of daily San Francisco precipitation from 1895 to 2024 and we look for 3-day, 5-day, 14-day and 30-day rainfall records. The results are as shown in Table 6.2.

Event	Record (inches)	Year
3-day	6.94	2023
5-day	8.55	2023
14-day	12.62	2023
30-day	18.93	1998

Table 6.2: Extreme rainfall records, San Francisco, 1895–2024.

The records all cluster in the more recent years. 2023 appears to be an exceptional year and since it is near the end of the sample, it might suggest that the climate has shifted into a more hazardous state, perhaps as a result of human influences. Note: “2023” indicates the event occurred in the water year of Aug 2022 to Jul 2023.

But the picture is very different if we use a sample that begins 45 years earlier, in 1850. Table 6.3 shows that the record-setting events all happened in the 1860s. Furthermore 2023 is now not even in 2nd place but falls to 3rd or 4th place. Also, comparing the records of the two charts the extreme precipitation events in 1862 and 1867 involved considerably more rainfall than the 1998 and 2023 events, with 14- and 30-day totals about 50 percent higher.

Event	Record (inches)	Year	Rank of 130-yr extreme
3-day	8.85	1867	3
5-day	9.80	1867	3
14-day	19.05	1862	4
30-day	28.25	1862	2

Table 6.3: Extreme rainfall records, San Francisco, 1850–2024.

The range of natural variability is made even more remarkable when paleoclimate evidence is examined. Porter et al. (2011) discovered that in the past 1,800 years at least six megastorms were more intense than the devastating 1861–62 APk Storm that struck the region. Evidently such extreme events, “unprecedented” in our 1895–2024 sample, have impacted the region about every 300 years, though not since 1895.

This example illustrates the limitations of using relatively short climate periods (~130 years) to assess the character and range of natural variability in general and of extreme events in particular. Accurate representation of the full range of natural variability is necessary for any attribution analyses (see 8.6). Infrastructure planners, emergency management institutions and attribution scientists would understand the significant mischaracterization of the magnitude of a future extreme if based only on the last 130 years. In this case, a single time sample of 130 years provides an underestimation of the extreme value by up to 50% determined when adding only 45 more years of observations. Compared to millennial-scale paleoclimate evidence, an even greater underestimation would occur. An important lesson is that the climate can deliver great surprises on its own, even without human influences.

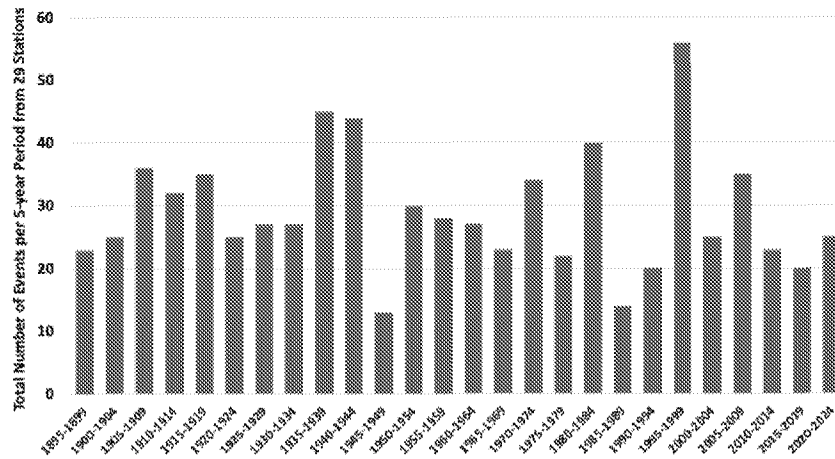


Figure 6.4.2. The time distribution by 5-year periods of the 26 heaviest (1-in-5 yr) occurrences for 29 stations on the Pacific coast.

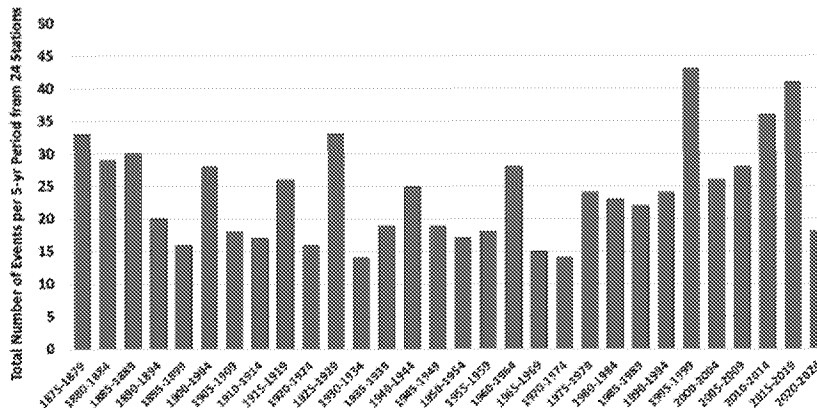


Figure 6.4.3. As in Fig. 6.4.2 but for the heaviest 30 (1-in-5yr) events for 24 stations in the humid Southeast from Austin TX to Washington DC in 5-year bins for 1875-2024.

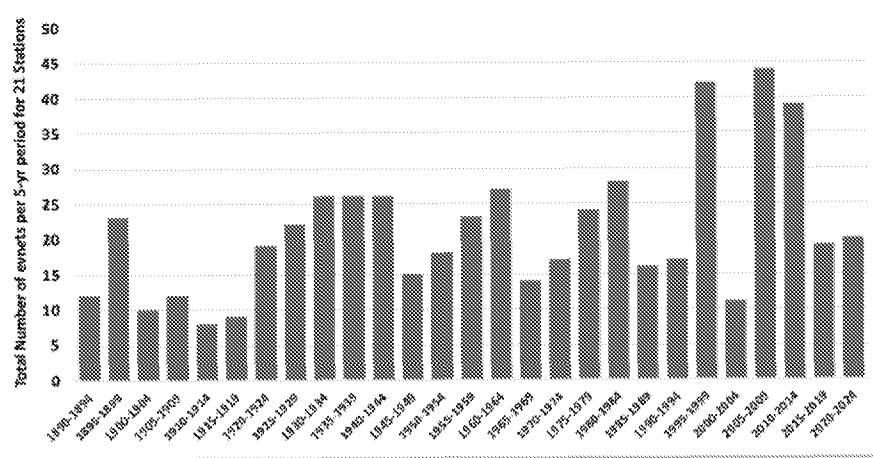


Figure 6.4.4. As in Fig. 6.4.2 but for the heaviest 27 (1-in-5yr) 3-day precipitation events for 27 Northeast stations from NY to ME, including Montreal.

Northeast heavy rainfall events

- The trend in average precipitation is positive and statistically significant in 12 of 27 locations and also in the regional average.
- The trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant in Portland ME, Albany NY, Buffalo NY and Eastport ME, but insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant in Portland ME, Gardiner ME and Eastport ME, but insignificant elsewhere.
- When averaged over all stations in the region, there is no statistically significant trend in either the precipitation variance or maximum

Fig. 6.4.4 shows the same calculation for the last 135 years in 27 stations in the Northeast (including Montreal Canada). We use 3-day totals here as this produced the largest temporal variations in time. In this region, 72% of events occur during June to October and are dominated by incursions of hurricanes, tropical storms, or tropical storms that transition to extratropical systems. According to NCA4 and NCA5 this region experienced the largest increases in extreme events, so it merits a closer examination.

There is a noticeable clustering of extreme events from 1995 to 2014. Howarth et al. (2019) examined a similar region as in Fig. 6.5.5 that includes PA and NJ and reported significant differences in various precipitation extremes between two 18-year periods, 1979-96 and 1997-2014. That included a 317% increase in 24-hr events exceeding 6 inches, while we find a 51% increase over the same years. However, Figure 6.5.5 shows that frequency drops sharply after 2014, returning to the long-term average in the subsequent 5-year intervals, again illustrating the perils of drawing conclusions from short-term trends in highly variable metrics. There is a noticeable clustering of extreme events from 1995 to 2014. Howarth et al. (2019) examined a similar region as in Fig. 6.4.4 that includes PA and NJ and reported significant differences between two 18-year periods, 1979-96 and 1997-2014, of various precipitation extremes, including a 317% increase in 24-hr events exceeding 6 inches, while we find a 51% increase over the same years. However, Figure 6.4.4 shows that frequency drops sharply after 2014, returning to the long-term

average in the subsequent 5 year intervals, again illustrating the perils of drawing conclusions from short-term trends in highly variable metrics.

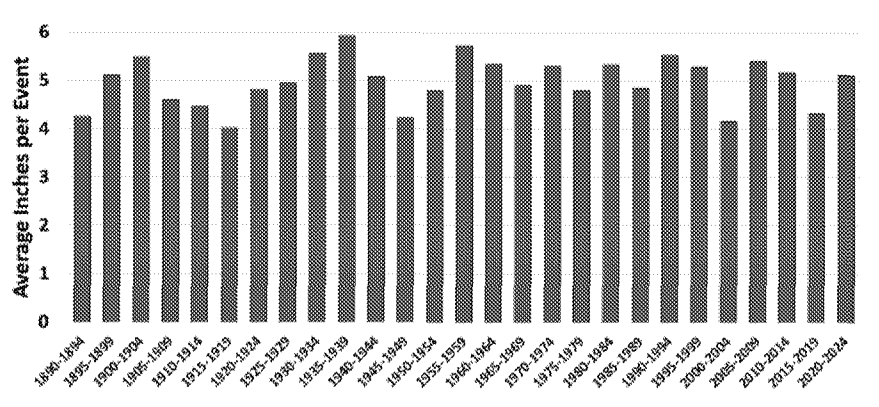


Figure 6.4.5. Average amount of precipitation falling in the 1-in-5yr events for the NE stations

Also, The high percentage increase in the Howarth *et al.* sample is associated with small numbers at relatively few locations: there were only 6 in the first period and 25 in the second across 58 stations. Most of the stations did not record such an event. If there is a region-wide increase in heavy events, it should be seen in the average across all stations. Figure 6.4.5 shows the average precipitation in the 1-in-5 yr events across the NE. The trend is only +0.02"/decade. The highest amount, 1935-39, includes the Great New England Hurricane of 1938, one of the rare major (Category 3 or higher) hurricanes to strike the region. The results in Figs. 6.4.4 and 6.4.5 thus suggest that though there was a surge in the number of events at a few locations during the 1995 to 2014 interval, there was no regional pattern and the change did not persist beyond 2014.

Jong *et al.* (2024) document the increase of tropical influences on precipitation events in the Northeast since 1959 and concluded, "The autumn extreme precipitation trend over the Northeast US is primarily attributed to tropical cyclone-related events since the 1990s." The question then becomes: was the temporal clustering of tropical systems in 1997-2014 which affected the Northeast a response to increasing GHGs? Jong *et al.* examined CMIP-6 model output which suggests that there will be fewer such systems in the 21st century but that the intensity of the rainfall events might increase. This conjecture is not seen in Fig. 6.4.5 where the amount-per-event has remained steady over the 135-year period.

There is some evidence to indicate the heaviest rainfall events may be redistributed due to the impact of urban infrastructure on the local weather (e.g., Pielke Sr. *et al.* 2011, Zhang *et al.* 2018, Yang *et al.* 2024). Yang *et al.* state "Cities that experience compact development tend to witness larger increases in extreme rainfall frequency over downtown than their rural surroundings, while the anomalies in extreme rainfall frequency diminish for cities with dispersed development." While this is an important insight to consider, the effect on the specific stations used in this analysis is unknown, or at least not detectable in Fig. 6.4.5.

In summary, some U.S. regions show short-duration increases in extreme precipitation events, consistent with natural variability. But analysis of long term, nationwide historical records that considers the autocorrelation properties of precipitation data does not support the claim that extreme short-duration rainfall events are becoming more frequent or intense. There is some evidence to indicate the heaviest rainfall events may be redistributed due to the impact urban infrastructure has on the local weather (e.g., Pielke Sr. et al. 2011, Zhang et al. 2018, Yang et al. 2024). Yang et al. state, “Cities that experience compact development tend to witness larger increases in extreme rainfall frequency over downtown than their rural surroundings, while the anomalies in extreme rainfall frequency diminish for cities with dispersed development.” While this is an important insight to consider, the effect on the specific stations used in this analysis is unknown, or at least not detectable in Fig. 6.4.4.

In summary, some regions show short-interval increases in extreme precipitation events, consistent with natural variability. But analysis of long term, nationwide historical records taking into account the autocorrelation properties of precipitation data does not support the claim that extreme short-duration rainfall events are becoming more frequent or intense.

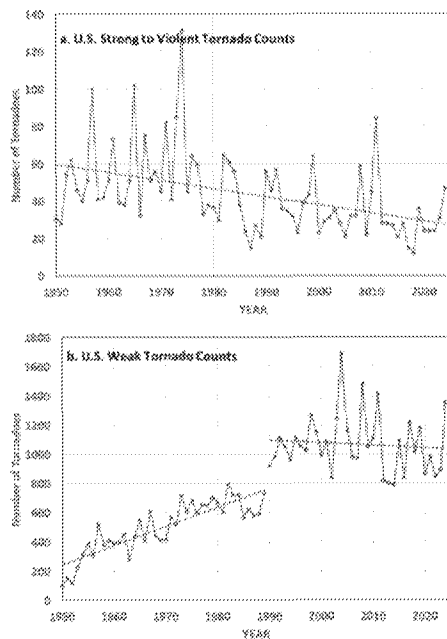


Figure 6.6.1. Annual U.S. tornado counts for (a) strong to violent tornadoes (EF3 to EF5), and (b) weak tornadoes (EF0 to EF2). Based upon NOAA Storm Prediction Center data, available at https://www.spc.noaa.gov/wcm/data/1950-2024__actual_tornadoes.csv.

6.5 Tornadoes

AR6 assesses tornado trends in the US as follows:

[O]bservational trends in tornadoes, hail, and lightning associated with severe convective storms are not robustly detected due to insufficient coverage of the long-term observations. There is *medium confidence* that the mean annual number of tornadoes in the USA has remained relatively constant. (Chapter 11, section 11.7.3, p. 1594)

The monitoring of weak tornadoes has changed over time. The growth of rural populations and the increasing ability to take video with hand-held devices has led to more frequent reports of weak tornadoes that produce minimal damage. In contrast, strong to violent tornadoes have been observed more consistently over time. Since statistics began in 1950, there has been a substantial decrease (by about 50%) in the number of strong to violent tornadoes as shown in Fig. 6.6.1a. Note that tornado strength is measured by the damage it produces, not by the visual appearance of the funnel. Limited real-time observational capabilities in earlier decades did not prevent identification because strong to violent tornadoes leave much more damage which will be assessed later even if the tornado itself was not observed. Since statistics began in 1950, there has been a substantial decrease (by about 50%) in the number of strong to violent tornadoes as shown in Fig. 6.6.1a.

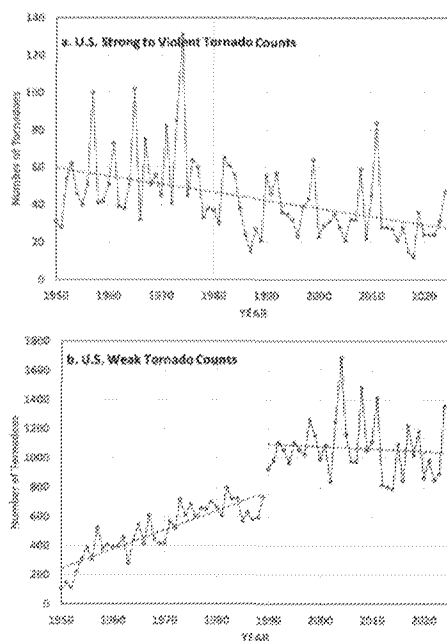


Figure 6.6.1. Annual U.S. tornado counts for (a) strong to violent tornadoes (EF3 to EF5) and (b) weak tornadoes (EF0 to EF2). Based upon NOAA Storms Prediction Center data available at https://www.spc.noaa.gov/wcm/data/1950-2024_actual_tornadoes.csv

To summarize, there is a noticeable downward trend in the number of severe tornadoes in the U.S. since 1950. After 1990 the number of weak tornadoes in the U.S. has remained roughly constant; data before that are incomplete due to limited monitoring.

6.6 Flooding

Changes in floods were assessed as follows:

AR6: The SREX **assessed low confidence for observed changes in the magnitude or frequency of floods** at the global scale. This assessment was confirmed by the AR5 report. The SR15 found increases in flood frequency and extreme streamflow in some regions, but decreases in other regions. . . [H]ydrological literature on observed flood changes is heterogeneous, focusing at regional and sub-regional basin scales, making it difficult to synthesise at the global and sometimes regional scales. (Chapter 11.5)

AR6: [T]he seasonality of floods has changed in cold regions where snowmelt dominates the flow regime in response to warming (*high confidence*). Confidence about peak flow trends over past decades on the global scale is *low*. (Chapter 11.5)

NCA4: Trends in extreme high values of streamflow are **mixed** across the United States. Analysis of 200 U.S. stream gauges indicates areas of both increasing and decreasing flooding magnitude **but does not provide robust evidence** that these trends are attributable to human influences (pp. 240-241)

The absence of detectable US-wide trends in flooding is consistent with the findings in Section 6.5 of absence of coherent changes in extreme precipitation.

6.7 Droughts

Assessments of drought trends were as follows.

AR6: Few AR6 regions show observed increases in meteorological drought (Section 11.9, p. 1575),

AR6: Increasing trends in agricultural and ecological droughts have been observed on all continents (*medium confidence*), but decreases only in one AR6 region (*medium confidence*). Increasing trends in hydrological droughts have been observed in a few AR6 regions. (Chapter 11 Summary)

NCA4: As a consequence of this increased precipitation, **drought statistics over the entire CONUS have declined**. (p. 233)

NCA4: Recent droughts and associated heat waves have reached record intensity in some regions of the United States; however, by geographical scale and duration, the Dust Bowl era of the **1930s remains the benchmark** drought and extreme heat event in the historical record (very high confidence). (p. 231)

SREX: From a paleoclimate perspective, **recent droughts are not unprecedented**, with severe ‘megadroughts’ reported in the paleoclimatic record for Europe, North America, and Australia. (p. 170)

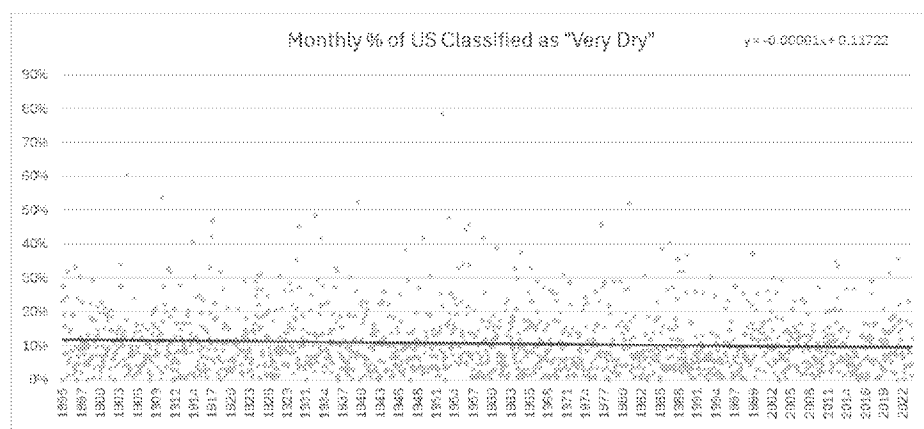


Figure 6.8.1: US dryness (%) 1895—2023. Source: NOAA [[HYPERLINK "https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/uspa/wet-dry/0"](https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/uspa/wet-dry/0)]

As shown in Figure 6.8.1, US long term data shows an insignificantly declining trend toward extreme dryness (-0.001% per year)

Kogan *et al.* (2020) examines a 38-year high-resolution satellite-based drought measure and concludes that global drought has not intensified and is not connected to climate change: “it is possible to state firmly that global and main grain countries’ drought area and intensity trends have not been following global climate warming since 1980’s.”

In summary there is no evidence of increasing drought frequency or intensity in the U.S. or globally over recent decades.

6.8 Wildfires

The IPCC has not provided an assessment of wildfires. As shown in Figure 6.9.1, global wildfire activity as measured by European Space Agency shows a downward trend in the 21st century.

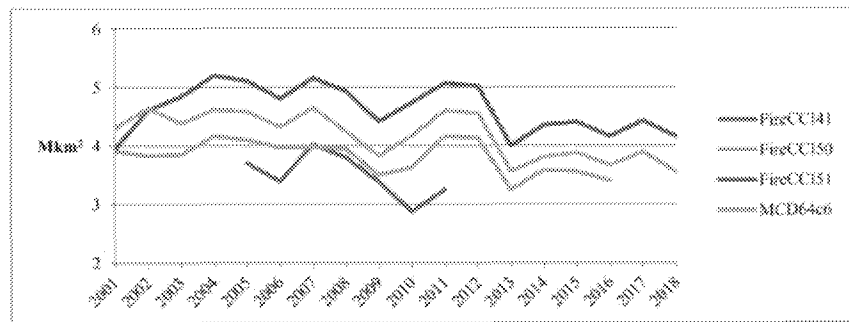


Figure 6.9.1: Global wildfire area 2001-2018. Source: From Lizundia-Loiola *et al.* (2021). The different coloured lines represent data products derived from different satellites and algorithms

Global data show that wildfire coverage is constant or declining on every continent (Samborska and Ritchie, 2024).

Active fire suppression since 1900 makes it difficult to establish a natural baseline for wildfire activity in the U.S. Paleoclimatic evidence indicates that past activity was much higher than today. Marlon *et al.* (2012) used sedimentary charcoal layers to reconstruct fire history of western US for the past 1400 years and also fit a model to predict fire activity as a function of climatic conditions. Their results are summarized in Figure 6.9.2 below (from Figure 2 in their paper). There has been a growing wildfire deficit over the 20th century. In other words, however much fire was observed in the 20th century, it was less than what would have been observed in previous centuries based on the climatic conditions. Parks *et al.* (2025) likewise find that despite the recent increase in wildfire burn area in North America, a significant wildfire deficit remains relative to historical wildfire regimes.

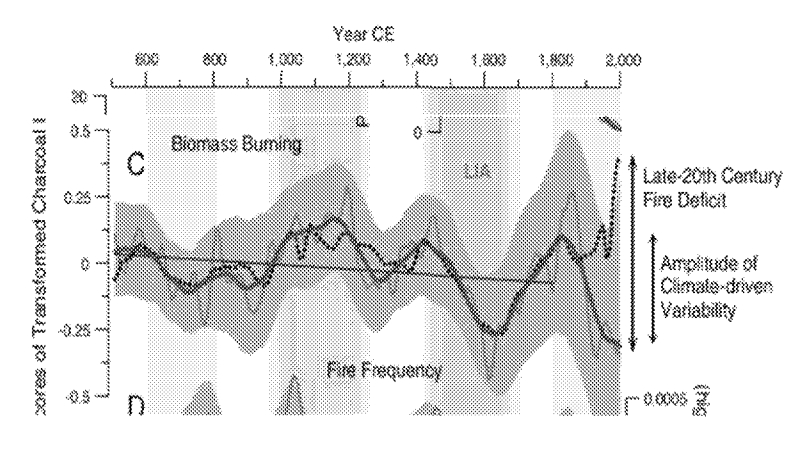


Figure 6.9.2 Fire frequency and fire deficit in the US. The red line shows the smoothed charcoal record and the black dotted line shows the predicted charcoal record based climatic conditions. model. Source: Copied from Marlon et al. et al. (2012)

US data from the National Interagency Fire Centre (NIFC) from 1926 to 2023 are shown in Figure 6.9.3. The NIFC has removed the pre-1960 data from its current website on the grounds that measurement methods changed after 1960 making the comparison unreliable. Nonetheless just focusing on the post-1985 interval the number of fires is not increasing. The area burned did increase but only until about 2007.

Forest fires have always been a part of nature, and they can certainly create conditions that are inhospitable in the short term for all life, including humans. Science has confirmed the overall benefit and necessity of forest fires. While recent high-profile fires and seasons serve as a reminder of the potential destructive impact, the highest profile U.S. forest fire remains the 1910 Big Blowup fire, which destroyed over three million acres and eliminated entire towns like Taft, MT (Apple, 2020). The 1910 fire reshaped the U.S. Forest Service (National Forest Foundation 2022) leading to a focus on fire suppression with a primary goal of defeating all forest fires (Forest History Society, 2022). This led to the “10 am rule” in 1935 requiring that all fires spotted on any day had to be controlled by 10 am the following day (National Forest Foundation, 2022). Forest fires have always been a part of nature, and they can certainly create conditions that are inhospitable in the short term for all life including humans. Science has confirmed the overall benefit and necessity of the occurrence of forest fires. While recent high-profile fires and seasons serve as a reminder of the potential destructive impact, the highest profile forest fire remains the 1910 Big Blowup fire which destroyed over three million acres including the elimination of entire towns like Taft, MT (Apple, 2020). The 1910 fire reshaped the U.S. Forest Service (National Forest Foundation 2022) leading to a focus on fire suppression with a primary goal to defeat all forest fires (Forest History Society, 2022). This led to the 10 am rule in 1935 requiring that all fires spotted on any day had to be controlled by 10 am the following day (National Forest Foundation, 2022).

While defeating all fires seemed a noble goal, questions began to arise as to whether this behavior “followed the science” (US Forest Service, 2022). Over time the U.S. Forest Service has begun to rethink its goals, recognizing that new approaches such as prescribed burns, fuel elimination, and controlled wildfires are more appropriate (Sommer, 2016). Recent research is validating this approach and recognizing

that more frequent smaller fires likely result in the healthier forests, water ecosystems and biodiversity (Stephens et al., 2021).

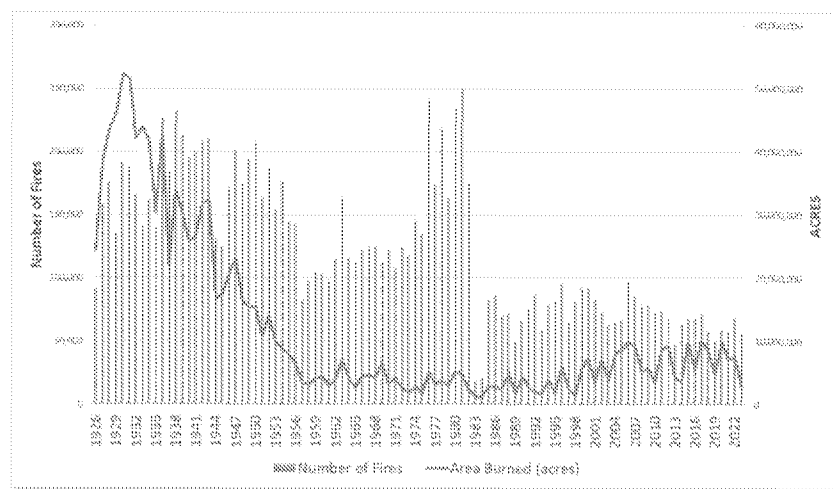


Figure 6.9.3: US wildfires 1926 to 2023. Source: Post-2018: National InterAgency Fire Center data Pre-2017 webarchive.org.

References

- Apple, C. (2020, January 21). 1910 fire – The big burn across Montana and Idaho. *The Spokesman-Review*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2020/jan/19/1910-fire-big-burn-across-montana-and-idaho/>" \t "_new"]
- Bell, Gerald D. and Muthuvel Chelliah, “Leading Tropical Modes Associated with Interannual and Multidecadal Fluctuations in North Atlantic Hurricane Activity,” *Journal of Climate* 19, no. 4 (February 15, 2006): 590–612, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/JCLI3659.1>"].
- Brewer, W. H. (1930). *Up and down California in 1860–1864: The journal of William H. Brewer*. University of California Press.
- Christy, J. R., Norris, W. B., and McNider, R. T. (2009). Surface temperature variations in East Africa and possible causes. *Journal of Climate*, 22(12), 3342–3356. <https://doi.org/10.1175/2008JCLI2726.1>
- Cohn, T. A. and Lins, H. F. (2005). Nature’s style: Naturally trendy. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 32(23). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2005GL024476>" \t "_new"]
- Colorado State University. (2025). *Realtime tropical cyclone guidance*. [HYPERLINK "<https://tropical.atmos.colostate.edu/Realtime/index.php>" \t "_new"]
- Forest History Society (2022). *The 1910 fires*. [HYPERLINK "<https://foresthistory.org/research-explore/us-forest-service-history/policy-and-law/fire-u-s-forest-service/famous-fires/the-1910-fires/>" \t "_new"]

- Gershunov, A., and K. Guirguis (2012). California heat waves in the present and future. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 39(18). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2012GL052979>" \t "_new"]
- Gershunov, A., T. Shulgina, F.M. Ralph, D.A. Lavers J.J. and Rutz (2017). Assessing the climate-scale variability of atmospheric rivers affecting western North America. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 44(15), 7900–7908. <https://doi.org/10.1002/2017GL074175>
- Goldenberg, Stanley ~~et al.~~, “The Recent Increase in Atlantic Hurricane Activity: Causes and Implications,” *Science* 293, no. 5529 (July 20, 2001): 474–479, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1060040>.
- Howarth, M. E., C.D. Thorncroft, and L.F. Bosart (2019). Changes in extreme precipitation in the Northeast United States: 1979–2014. *Journal of Hydrometeorology*, 20(4), 673–689. <https://doi.org/10.1175/JHM-D-18-0155.1>
- Hurst, H. E. (1951). Long term storage capacities of reservoirs. *Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers*, 116, 776–808.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). (2021). *Climate change 2021: The physical science basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (V. Masson-Delmotte ~~et al.~~, Eds.). Cambridge University Press. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>" \t "_new"]
- Jong, B.-T., H. Murakami, T.L. Delworth and W.F. Cooke (2024). Contributions of tropical cyclones and atmospheric rivers to extreme precipitation trends over the Northeast US. *Earth's Future*, 12, e2023EF004370. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2023EF004370>" \t "_new"]
- Karl, T. R., C.N. Williams Jr., F.T. Quinlan, and T.A. Boden (1990). *United States Historical Climatology Network (HCN) serial temperature and precipitation data* (Publication No. 3404). Oak Ridge National Laboratory.
- Klotzbach, Phil ~~et al.~~ (2018) Continental U.S. Hurricane Landfall Frequency and Associated Damage: Observations and Future Risks, *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 99, no. 7 (July 2018): 1359–1376, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/BAMS-D-17-0184.1>"].
- Kogan, Feliz, Wei Guob and Wenzhe Yang (2020) “Near 40-year drought trend during 1981-2019 earth warming and food security” *Geomatics, Natural Hazards and Risk* Vol 11(1)
- Koutsoyiannis, D. (2013) Hydrology and Change. *Hydrological Sciences Journal* 58(6) [HYPERLINK "<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02626667.2013.804626>"]
- Markonis, Y., and D. Koutsoyiannis (2016). Scale-dependence of persistence in precipitation records. *Nature Climate Change*, 6, 399–401. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2894>
- Marlon, Jennifer, Patrick J Bartlein, Daniel G. Gavin ~~et al.~~ (2012) Long-term perspective on wildfires in the western USA *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* February 14 2012 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.pnas.org/doi/pdf/10.1073/pnas.1112839109>"]
- Maue, R. N. (2025). *Climatlas: Tropical cyclones*. [HYPERLINK "<https://climatlas.com/tropical/>" \t "_new"]
- McKittrick, R., and J.R. Christy (2019). Assessing changes in US regional precipitation on multiple time scales. *Journal of Hydrology*, 578, 124074. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhydrol.2019.124074>" \t "_new"]
- McKittrick, R., and J.R. Christy (2025), “Data and Code for DoE Report 2025”, Mendeley Data, V1, doi: 10.17632/8n9ks93vn7.1
- Null, J. and J. Hulbert, “California Washed Away: The Great Flood of 1862,” *Weatherwise* 60, no. 1 (2007): 26–30, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3200/wewi.60.1.26-30>"]
- National Forest Foundation. (2022). *Blazing battles: The 1910 fire and its legacy*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nationalforests.org/our-forests/your-national-forests-magazine/blazing-battles-the-1910-fire-and-its-legacy>" \t "_new"]
- National Interagency Fire Center. (2024). *Wildfire statistics*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/statistics/wildfires>" \t "_new"]

- NCA4. (2017). *Climate science special report: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume I* (D. J. Wuebbles, D. W. Fahey, and K. A. Hibbard, Eds.). U.S. Global Change Research Program. <https://doi.org/10.7930/J0J964J6>
- NCA5. (2023). *Fifth National Climate Assessment* (A. R. Crimmins ~~et al.~~ *et al.*, Eds.). U.S. Global Change Research Program. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH1>" \t "_new"]
- NOAA Hurricane Research Division. (2025a). *All U.S. hurricanes (1851–2019)*. [HYPERLINK "https://www.aoml.noaa.gov/hrd/hurdat/All_U.S._Hurricanes.html" \t "_new"]
- NOAA Hurricane Research Division. (2025b). *Most intense (3, 4, 5) continental United States hurricanes: 1851–1970, and 1983–2023*. [HYPERLINK "https://www.aoml.noaa.gov/hrd/hurdat/most_intense.html" \t "_new"]
- Overland, J. E. (2021). Causes of the record-breaking Pacific Northwest heatwave, late June 2021. *Atmosphere*, 12(11), 1434. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3390/atmos12111434>" \t "_new"]
- Pan, M., M. Lu and U. Lall (2024). Diversity of cross-Pacific atmospheric river main routes. *Communications Earth and Environment*, 5, 378. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01552-y>" \t "_new"]
- Parks, Sean, Christopher Guiterman, Ellis Margolis ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2025) A fire deficit persists across diverse North American forests despite recent increases in area burned. *Nature Communications* 16 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-025-56333-8>"]
- Pielke, R. A., ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2011). Land use/land cover changes and climate: Modeling analysis and observational evidence. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 2, 828–850. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.144>
- Porter, K., ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2011). *Overview of the ARkStorm scenario*, U.S. Geological Survey.
- Quinlan, F. T., T. R. Karl, and C.N. Williams Jr. (1987). *United States Historical Climatology Network (USHCN) serial temperature and precipitation data* (NDP-019). Oak Ridge National Laboratory.
- Seneviratne, S. ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2021) “Chapter 11: Weather and Climate Extreme Events in a Changing Climate.” In *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, edited by V. Masson-Delmotte, P. Zhai, A. Pirani, S.L. Connors, C. Péan, S. Berger, N. Caud, ~~et al.~~ *et al.*, 1513–1766. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157896.013>.
- Samborska, V., and H. Ritchie (2024). Wildfires. *Our World in Data*. [HYPERLINK "<https://ourworldindata.org/wildfires>" \t "_new"]
- Sommer, L. (2016, November 7). Let it burn: The Forest Service wants to stop putting out some fires. *KQED*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.kqed.org/science/1134217/let-it-burn-the-forest-service-wants-to-stop-putting-out-some-fires>" \t "_new"]
- Stephens, Scott ~~et al.~~ *et al.*, (2021) “Fire, Water, and Biodiversity in the Sierra Nevada: A Possible Triple Win,” *Environmental Research Communications* 3, no. 8 (August 6, 2021): p. 081004, <https://doi.org/10.1088/2515-7620/ac17e2>.
- U.S. Forest Service. (2022). *Managing fire*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.fs.usda.gov/science-technology/fire>" \t "_new"]
- USGCRP. (2023). *USGCRP indicators platform: Heat waves*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves>" \t "_new"]
- Vecchi, Gabriel A. and Thomas R. Knutson (2011) “Estimating Annual Numbers of Atlantic Hurricanes Missing from the HURDAT Database (1878–1965) Using Ship Track Density,” *Journal of Climate* 24, no. 6 (2011): 1736–1746, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/2010JCLI3810.1>"].
- Villarini, Gabriele, Gabriel A. Vecchi, and James A. Smith, “U.S. Landfalling and North Atlantic Hurricanes: Statistical Modeling of Their Frequencies and Ratios,” *Monthly Weather Review* 140, no. 1 (January 2012): 44–65, <https://doi.org/10.1175/MWR-D-11-00063.1>.

Web Archive. (n.d.). *Archive of NIFC fire data*. [HYPERLINK

"https://web.archive.org/web/20200212033452/https://www.nifc.gov/fireInfo/fireInfo_stats_totalFires.html" \t "_new"]

Yang, L., Y. Yang, Y. Shen, ~~et al~~ *et al.* (2024). Urban development pattern's influence on extreme rainfall occurrences. *Nature Communications*, 15, 3997. [HYPERLINK

"https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-48533-5" \t "_new"]

Zhang, W., G. Villarini, G.A. Vecchi, and J.A. Smith, J. A. (2018). Urbanization exacerbated the rainfall and flooding caused by Hurricane Harvey in Houston. *Nature*, 563, 384–388. [HYPERLINK

"https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-018-0676-z"]

7 CHANGES IN SEA LEVEL

Chapter Summary

Since 1900, global average sea level has risen by about 8 inches. Sea level change along U.S. coasts is highly variable, associated with local variations in processes that contribute to sinking and also with ocean circulation patterns. The highest levels of largest sea level rise along U.S. coasts are Galveston, New Orleans, and the Chesapeake Bay regions - each of these locations is associated with substantial local land sinking (subsidence) unrelated to climate change.

Extreme projections of global sea level rise are associated with an implausible extreme emissions scenario and inclusion of poorly understood processes associated with hypothesized-hypothetical ice sheet instabilities. In evaluating the IPCC AR6 projections to 2050 (with reference to the baseline period 1995-2014), almost half of the sea level rise has already occurred by 2025 and at a lower rate than predicted. U.S. tide gauge measurements shown herein reveal no obvious acceleration beyond the historical average rate of sea level rise.

7.1 Global sea level rise

Global sea level rise is arguably the most important climate impact driver that is unambiguously associated with increasing temperatures. At the global level, warming raises sea level through thermal expansion of the volume of sea water and through melting of glaciers and ice sheets. Variations in land water storage are another important factor. At the regional scale, sea level change is influenced by large-scale ocean circulation patterns, and geologic processes and deformation from the redistribution of ice and water. Locally, vertical land motion from geologic processes, ground water withdrawal, and fossil fuel extraction are also important.

The IPCC AR6 estimates that global mean sea level increased by 7.9 (5.9–9.8) inches between 1901 and 2018, with the rate of sea level rise accelerating in recent decades. At the ocean basin scale, sea levels have risen fastest in the Western Pacific and slowest in the Eastern Pacific over the period 1993–2018 (Fox-Kemper *et al.*, 2021). The rate of global sea level rise is estimated to be 0.12 inches/year (for reference, 0.12 in is about the height of two stacked pennies) (NASA, 2020).

The observing systems for global sea level rise have advanced significantly in the satellite era, particularly with the advent of satellite altimeters since in 1993. Local tide gauges have provided useful data for the past century, and even longer for a few locations. Following the end of the Little Ice Age in the mid-nineteenth century, tide gauges show that the global mean sea level began rising during the period 1820–1860, well before most anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions.

7.2 U.S. sea level rise

Observed and predicted rates of mean global sea level rise might have little scientific relevance for specific locations, owing to local processes (NOAA, 2025). Figure 7.1 shows that in Canada and Alaska (and also northern Washington), sea level is actually decreasing, owing to uplift from glacial rebound. Most of the Pacific coast tide gauges show rises between 0.12 inches/year, while largest U.S. rates are on the Gulf coast (Louisiana and Texas) and in the mid-Atlantic states (Chesapeake Bay region).

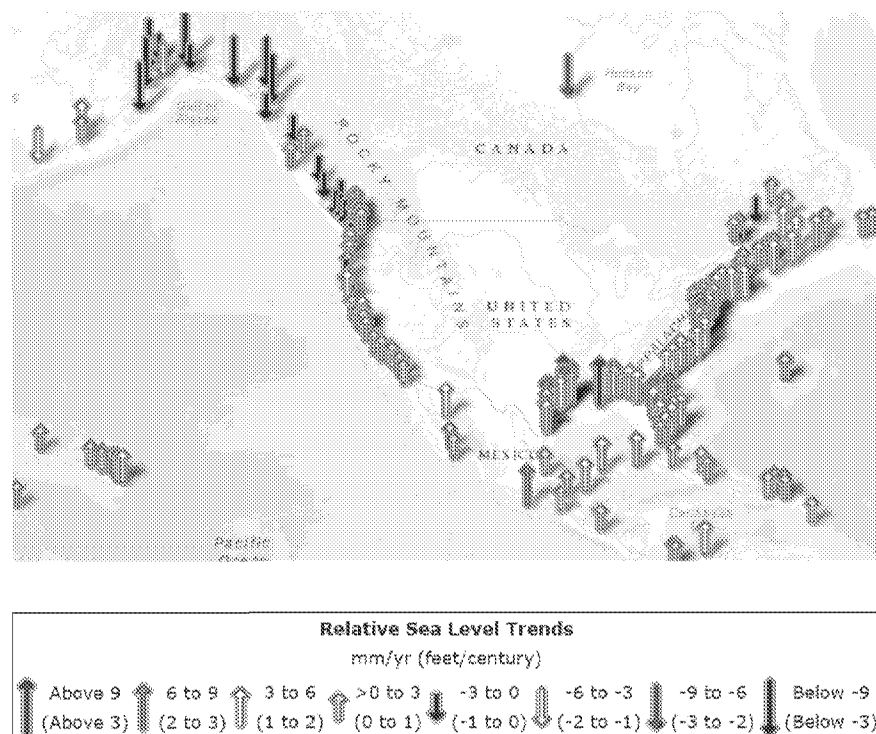


Figure 7.1. Map of rates of relative sea level rise along the U.S. coast (NOAA, <https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/sltrends/>). For reference, 3 mm = 0.12 in.

Measurements of relative sea level rise from tide gauges conflate the climatologically relevant increase in the volume of seawater with local vertical land motion. That latter, which varies from place to place, is best measured using a Global Positioning System (GPS) station located near the tide gauge. It is driven by a range of processes that can be comparable to the climate signal and can locally exacerbate (subsidence/sinking) or mitigate (uplift) the risk of sea level rise (Wöppelmann and Marcos, 2016). Human activities triggering subsidence are often significant. They include soil drainage (e.g. for urban development purposes) and subsurface extraction of groundwater, oil, or gas or hydrocarbons.

Table 7.1 shows absolute sea-level rise (ASLR) for selected locations, determined from the sum of uncorrected sea-level rise as estimated from tide gauge time series (RSLR) (NOAA, 2025) and the vertical land motion (VLM) measurements (NAS, 2012; Letetrel *et al.*, 2015; Karegar *et al.*, 2016). The absolute sea level rise for each of these locations is significantly smaller than the measured relative sea level rise owing to local subsidence. More than half of the measured relative sea level rise is attributed to land sinking for these locations: San Francisco, Galveston, Grand Isle. For reference, the global average rate of absolute sea level rise is estimated to be 0.12 inches/year.

Location	RSLR	VLM	ASLR
San Francisco, CA	+0.08	-0.06	+0.02
Galveston, TX	+0.26	-0.19	+0.07
Grand Isle, LA	+0.36	-0.28	+0.08
St Petersburg, FL	+0.12	-0.02	+0.10
New York City, NY	+0.11	-0.05	+0.06

Table 7.1 Absolute sea level rise (inches/year) consisting of Relative Sea Level Rise (RSLR) plus Vertical Land Motion (VLM))

San Francisco Bay

Over the past 100 years, relative sea level in the San Francisco Bay area has risen by 7.8 inches, at an average rate of 0.08 inches/year (Figure 7.2). As shown in Table 7.1, San Francisco's vertical land motion is -0.06 inches/year (sinking), producing a recent absolute rate of +0.02 inches/year. Portions of Treasure Island, San Francisco International Airport, and Foster City are sinking as fast as 0.4 inches/year (Shirzaei and Bürgmann, 2018). Problems in the San Francisco Bay area, including threats to the airport, have been caused primarily by soil compaction in landfill zones that were formerly wetlands, not by the slow creep of global sea level rise.

Galveston - Houston

Long-term tide measurements at Galveston Pier 21 show sea level rise of 2.18 feet in the past century, or a rate of 0.26 inches/year (Figure 7.3). Vertical land motion (subsidence) at Galveston is estimated at -0.19 inches/year, yielding an absolute rate of rise of +0.07 inches/year (Table 7.1). The U.S. Geologic Survey found that most of the land-surface subsidence in the Houston-Galveston region is a direct result of groundwater withdrawals (Kasmarek and Ramage), which caused compaction of the aquifer sediments, mostly in the fine-grained silt and clay layers. By 1979, as much as 10 feet of subsidence had occurred in Houston.

Hurricanes have been the major concern in the region. The 1900 hurricane that struck Galveston and killed between 6,000 and 12,000 people is still considered the deadliest U.S. natural disaster (Weems, 2016). Hurricane Ike (2008) decimated large portions of the Bolivar Peninsula, literally removing significant portions of the land mass (UCS, 2017). While only 17 people were killed in Texas, property damage exceeded \$50 billion (White, 2017). In 2017, Hurricane Harvey struck the region, bringing catastrophic rainfall-triggered flooding that inflicted over \$125 billion in damages (NOAA, 2025).

Hurricanes have been the major concern in the region. The 1900 hurricane that struck Galveston and killed between 6,000 and 12,000 people is still considered the deadliest U.S. natural disaster (Weems, 2016). Hurricane Ike (2008) decimated large portions of the Bolivar Peninsula, literally removing significant portions of the land mass (UCS, 2017). While only 17 people were killed in Texas, property damage exceeded \$50 billion (White, 2017). In 2017, Hurricane Harvey struck the region, bringing catastrophic rainfall-triggered flooding that inflicted over \$125 billion in damages (NOAA, 2025).

Commented [SK2]: Need to say why we're talking about hurricanes in this section, else delete this paragraph (my recommendation)

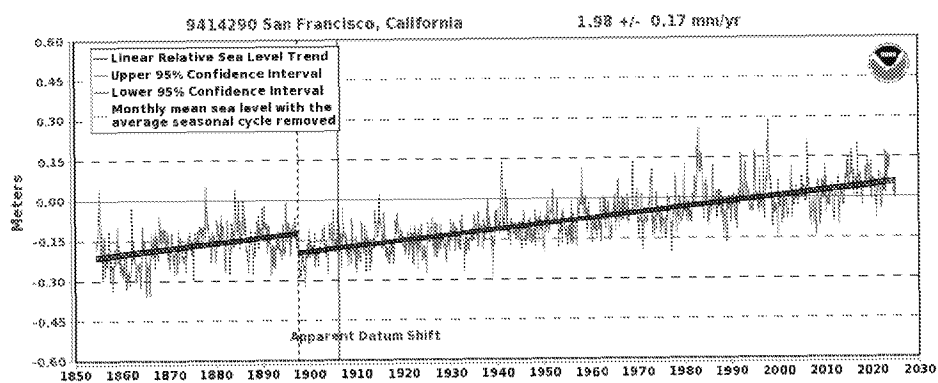


Figure 7.2. Tide gauge measurements at San Francisco, California, obtained from NOAA - https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/strends/strends_station.shtml?id=9414290 (downloaded 4/22/25).

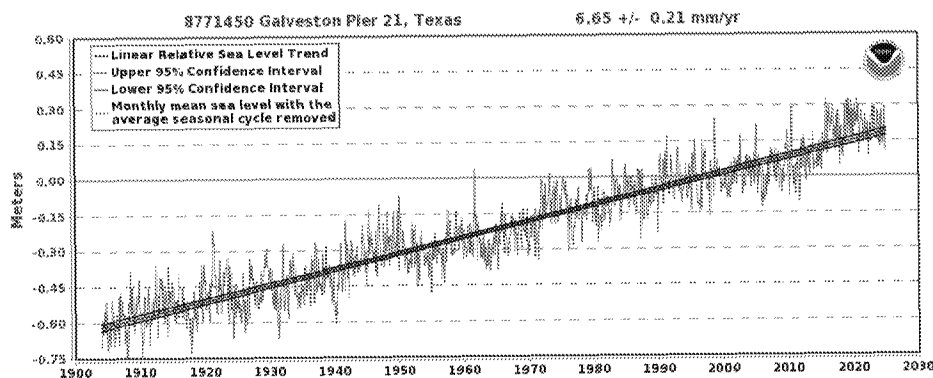


Figure 7.3. Tide gauge measurements Galveston Pier, TX, obtained from NOAA - https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/strends/strends_station.shtml?id=8771450 (downloaded 4/22/2025).

New Orleans and the Mississippi delta

Long-term tide gauge measurements at Grand Isle, Louisiana, show that sea level has risen by slightly more than 3 feet over the last 100 years at an average rate of 0.36 inches/year (Figure 7.4). Vertical land motion (subsidence) is estimated -0.28 inches/year. Table 7.1 gives the absolute sea level rise as +0.08 inches/year.

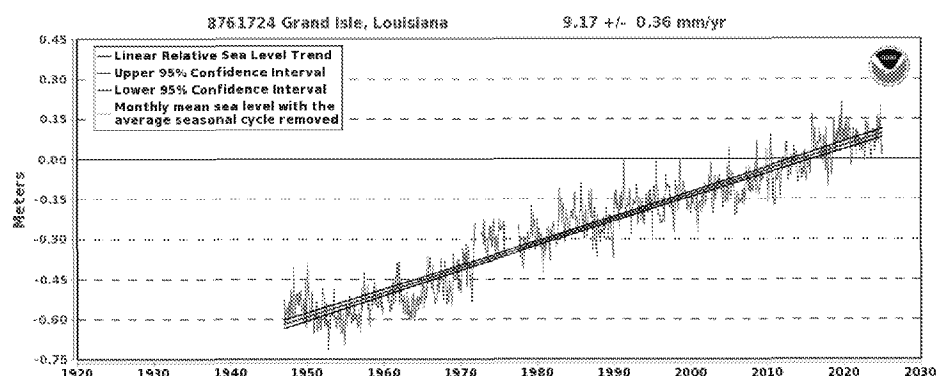


Figure 7.4. Tide gauge measurements at Grand Isle, LA, obtained from NOAA - https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/strends/strends_station.shtml?id=8761724 (downloaded 4/22/25).

The issues of sea level rise and land loss in the Mississippi Delta region are complex, with geological subsidence and the decline in sediment transported by the Mississippi river being the dominant drivers. The construction of dams in the basin since the 1950s has decreased the Mississippi’s suspended sediment load by ~50% (Maloney 2018). A new subsidence map of coastal Louisiana finds the coastal region to be sinking at about one third of an inch per year (Neinhuis et al. 2017), associated with groundwater and resource withdrawal. As the city’s elevation averages one to two feet *below* sea level, sea level rise from anthropogenic warming is hardly the dominant driver of New Orleans’ problems.

New York City

New York City is particularly vulnerable to the effects of sea level rise because it is built primarily on islands and has 520 miles of coastline. Measurements by a tide gauge at the southern tip of Manhattan (The Battery) show that relative sea level has risen over 11 inches over the past century, at an average rate of 0.11 inches/year (Figure 7.5). But vertical land motion in the New York City area is -0.05 inches/year (roughly 5 inches per century), so that the absolute rate of sea level rise at The Battery is 0.06 inches/year, or about 55% of the measured relative sea level rise.

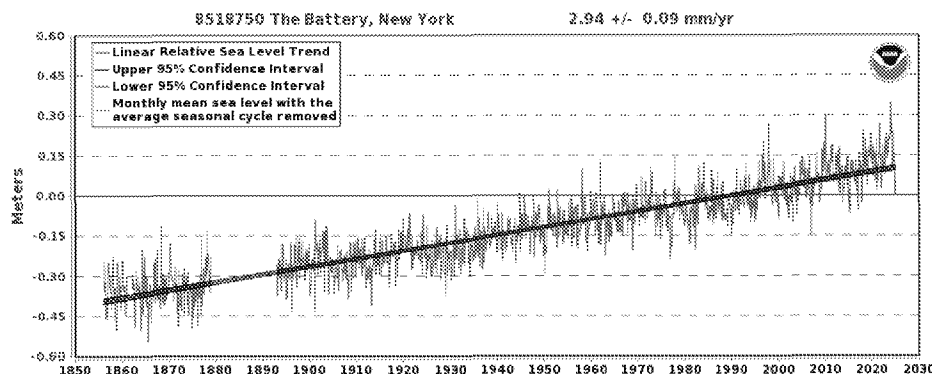


Figure 7.5. Tide gauge measurements at The Battery, New York, obtained from NOAA - https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/strends/strends_station.shtml?id=8518750 (downloaded 4/22/25).

Following Superstorm Sandy, New York developed a comprehensive plan: [[HYPERLINK "http://media.nyc.gov/agencies/sirr/SIRR_singles_Hi_res.pdf"](http://media.nyc.gov/agencies/sirr/SIRR_singles_Hi_res.pdf)] (CNY, 2013). A broad range of coastal protection measures ~~are~~ were outlined that match the risks facing the various zones: increase coastal edge elevations, minimize upland wave zones, infrastructure to protect against storm surge, improve coastal design and governance, restore estuaries wetlands, coastal nourishment, site elevation, and drainage systems.

7.3 Projected sea level rise

The concern over sea level rise is not about the roughly 8 inches of global rise since 1900. Rather, it is about projections of *accelerated* rise based upon simulations of a warming climate through the 21st Century.

The IPCC AR6 finds *high agreement* across published global mean sea level projections for 2050 with little sensitivity to emissions scenarios. Considering only projections incorporating ice-sheet processes in whose quantification there is at least *medium confidence*, the global sea level projections for 2050, across all emissions scenarios, fall between 3.94 and 15.75 inches (5th–95th percentile *very likely* range) relative to the 1995–2014 baseline period (Fox-Kemper *et al.*, 2021).

Conversely, AR6 states there is *low agreement* across published global mean sea level projections for 2100, particularly for higher emissions scenarios. Considering only projections representing ice sheet processes in whose quantification there is at least *medium confidence*, the AR6 global mean sea level projections for 2100 lie between 7.87 and 39.37 inches (5th–95th percentile *very likely* range) under the medium emissions scenario SSP2–4.5 (Fox-Kemper *et al.*, 2021). There is deep uncertainty surrounding projections of sea level rise to 2100 owing to uncertainties in ice sheet instabilities, particularly for the higher emissions scenarios.

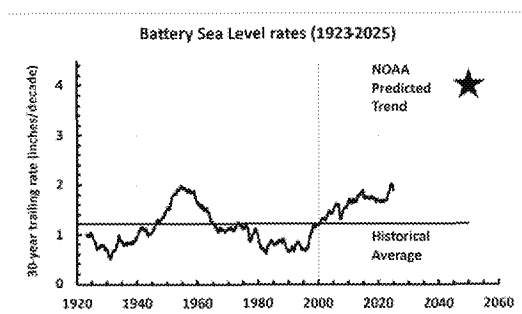


Figure 7.6 Rate of sea level rise at the Battery in Manhattan. Shown is the historical thirty-year trailing trend, together with the allegedly “locked in” NOAA predicted trend for 2050. Historical data: NOAA Tides and Current.

In evaluating the IPCC AR6 projections to 2050 (with reference to the baseline period 1995-2014), almost half of the sea level rise has already occurred by 2025. From the tide gauge measurements in Figures 7.2-7.5, there is no obvious acceleration in sea level rise beyond the historical average rate of sea level rise.

In February 2022, NOAA issued its projections of sea level rise for various sites along the US coast (Sweet et al, 2022). They claim that by 2050, the sea will have risen one foot at The Battery in Manhattan. A one-foot one-foot rise in thirty years would be more than twice the current rate and about three times the average rate over the past century. In that historical context, NOAA’s projection is remarkable—as shown in Figure 7.6, it would require a dramatic acceleration beyond anything observed ~~in~~ since the early 20th century. But even more noteworthy is that they say this rise is “locked in”—it will happen no matter what future emissions are. We should know in a decade or so whether that prediction has legs.

References

- City of New York. (2013, June). *A stronger, more resilient New York*. [HYPERLINK "http://s-media.nyc.gov/agencies/sirr/SIRR_singles_Hi_res.pdf" \t "_new"]
- Fox-Kemper, B., Hewitt, H. T., Xiao, C., Adalgeirsdóttir, G., Drijfhout, S. S., Edwards, T. L., ... & Yu, Y. (2021). Ocean, cryosphere and sea level change. In *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (pp. 1211–1362). Geneva, Switzerland: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- Karegar, M. A., Dixon, T. H., & Engelhart, S. E. (2016). Subsidence along the Atlantic Coast of North America: Insights from GPS and late Holocene relative sea level data. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 43(7), 3126–3133. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1002/2016GL068015>" \t "_new"]
- Kasmarek, M. C., & Ramage, J. K. (2017). *Water-level altitudes 2017 and water-level changes in the Chicot, Evangeline, and Jasper aquifers and compaction 1973–2016 in the Chicot and Evangeline aquifers, Houston-Galveston Region, Texas* (Scientific Investigations Report 2017–5080). U.S. Geological Survey. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3133/sir20175080>" \t "_new"]

- Letetrel, C., Becker, M., Llovel, W., & Cazenave, A. (2015). Estimation of vertical land movement rates along the coasts of the Gulf of Mexico over the past decades. *Continental Shelf Research*, 111(Part A), 42–51. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.csr.2015.10.018>" \t "_new"]
- Maloney, J. M., Bentley, S. J., Xu, K., Obelcz, J., Georgiou, I. Y., & Miner, M. D. (2018). Mississippi River subaqueous delta is entering a stage of retrogradation. *Marine Geology*, 400, 12–23. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.margeo.2018.03.001>" \t "_new"]
- National Academy of Science (NAS, 2012). *Sea-level rise for the coasts of California, Oregon and Washington: Past, present, and future*. Appendix A: Vertical land motion and sea-level data along the West Coast of the United States. National Academies Press.
<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/13389/sea-level-rise-for-the-coasts-of-california-oregon-and-washington>
- NASA. (2020). *NASA sea level rise portal: 2020 edition*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nasa.gov/specials/sea-level-rise-2020/>" \t "_new"]
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services. (n.d.). *Sea level trends*. [HYPERLINK "<https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/sltrends/>" \t "_new"]
- NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI). (2025). *U.S. billion-dollar weather and climate disasters*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/billions/>" \t "_new"]
<https://doi.org/10.25921/stkw-7w73>
- NOAA Tides & Currents. (n.d.). *Relative sea level trends*. [HYPERLINK "<https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/sltrends/>" \t "_new"]
- Nienhuis, J. H., Törnqvist, T. E., Esposito, C. R., Liang, M., & Ma, H. (2017). A new subsidence map for coastal Louisiana. *GSA Today*, 27(6), 28–29. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1130/GSATG337GW.1>" \t "_new"]
- Shirzaei, M., & Bürgmann, R. (2018). Global climate change and local land subsidence exacerbate inundation risk to the San Francisco Bay Area. *Science Advances*, 4(3), eaap9234. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aap9234>" \t "_new"]
- Sweet, W. V., Hamlington, B. D., Kopp, R. E., et al. (2022). *Global and regional sea level rise scenarios for the United States* (USGS Report 70229139). United States Geological Survey. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.usgs.gov/publications/global-and-regional-sea-level-rise-scenarios-united-states>" \t "_new"]
- Union of Concerned Scientists. (2017, June 23). *Galveston County, Texas, faces sea level rise and storms*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.ucs.org/resources/galveston-county-texas-faces-sea-level-rise-and-storms>" \t "_new"]
- Weems, J. E. (2016, March 15). *Galveston hurricane of 1900*. Texas State Historical Association. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/galveston-hurricane-of-1900>" \t "_new"]
- Wöppelmann, G., & Marcos, M. (2016). Vertical land motion as a key to understanding sea level change and variability. *Reviews of Geophysics*, 54, 64–92. <https://doi.org/10.1002/2015RG000502>

MISSING REFERENCE: White 2017

Formatted: Highlight

8 UNCERTAINTIES IN CLIMATE CHANGE ATTRIBUTION

Chapter summary

“Attribution” refers to ~~determining~~ identifying the cause ~~regarding~~ of some aspect of climate change, specifically with reference to anthropogenic activity. There is an ongoing scientific debate around attribution methods, particularly regarding extreme weather events. Attribution is made difficult by high natural variability, the relatively small expected anthropogenic signal, lack of high-quality data, and reliance on deficient climate models. The IPCC has long cautioned that methods to establish causality in climate science are inherently uncertain and ultimately depend on expert judgement.

Substantive criticism of the main IPCC assessments of the role of CO₂ in recent warming focus on inadequate assessment of natural climate variability, uncertainties in measurement of solar variability and in aerosol forcing, and problems in the statistical methods used for attribution.

The IPCC does not in general make attribution claims for most climate impact drivers related to extreme events. Statements related to statistics of global extremes (e.g. event probability or return times, magnitude and frequency) are not generally considered accurate owing to data limitations and are made with low confidence. Attribution of individual extreme weather events is challenging due to their rarity. Conflicting claims about the causes of the 2021 Western North America Heatwave illustrate the perils of hasty attribution claims about individual extreme events.

8.1 Introduction

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) distinguishes between detection of climate change and attribution of its cause. As defined by the IPCC AR6 WGI Glossary (IPCC, 2025):

Detection: Detection of change is defined as the process of demonstrating that climate or a system affected by climate has changed in some defined statistical sense, without providing a reason for that change. An identified change is detected in observations if its likelihood of occurrence by chance due to internal variability alone is determined to be small, for example, <10%.

Attribution: Attribution is defined as the process of evaluating the relative contributions of multiple causal factors to a change or event with a formal assessment of confidence.

Both steps rely on statistical analysis. Detection focuses on whether changes are significant enough to stand out from random variation regardless of cause. Attribution involves comparison of observed events to model-generated counterfactuals. Since experimentation on the climate is not possible, attribution requires statistical inference to assess how much human activities, such as GHG emissions, versus natural factors, like volcanic eruptions, contribute to observed changes. Attribution methods assume all external and internal drivers of the system are known and represented.

There are ongoing scientific debates around attribution methods, especially those for attributing extreme weather events to climate change. The IPCC has long cautioned that methods to establish causality in climate science are inherently uncertain and ultimately depend on expert judgement. AR4 Working Group I (Hegerl ~~et al~~ *et al.*, 2007) explained it as follows:

‘Attribution’ of causes of climate change is the process of establishing the most likely causes for the detected change with some defined level of confidence... unequivocal attribution would require controlled experimentation with the climate system. Since that is not possible, in practice attribution of anthropogenic climate change is understood to mean demonstration that a detected change is ‘consistent with the estimated responses to the given combination of anthropogenic and natural forcing’ and ‘not consistent with alternative, physically plausible explanations of recent climate change that exclude important elements of the given combination of forcings’ (IPCC, 2001)... The approaches used in detection and attribution research described above cannot fully account for all uncertainties, and thus ultimately expert judgement is required to give a calibrated assessment of whether a specific cause is responsible for a given climate change.

AR5 Working Group II (Cramer *et al.*, 2014) makes the following statement:

Two broad challenges to the detection and attribution of climate change impacts relate to observations and process understanding. On the observational side, high-quality, long-term data relating to natural and human systems and the multiple factors affecting them are rare. In addition, the detection and attribution of climate change impacts requires an understanding of the processes by which climate change, in conjunction with other factors, may affect the system in question.

Because of the complexity of the causal chains in the climate system, investigation of these relationships is exceptionally challenging.

be

8.2 Attribution methods

The IPCC employs several attribution methods to assess the causes of observed climate changes, distinguishing between natural and human-induced factors. Below is a concise description of the key IPCC attribution methods that have been used by the IPCC.

Optimal Fingerprinting uses linear regression to explain variations in observed climate data as a weighted sum of climate model simulations run with and without anthropogenic forcings. The data used in the regression model are weighted to try to minimize the influence of random noise and the estimation method is chosen to take account of climate model error.

Time Series Analysis exploits statistical differences between anthropogenic forcing and natural variability to see which dominates observed temperatures, and also uses variations in the timing of changes to determine if causal dependence across data series can be inferred.

Process-Based Attribution focuses on understanding the physical mechanisms behind observed changes. This approach combines observations, climate models, and theoretical understanding to attribute changes in specific processes to forcings. This approach is often used for regional climate phenomena, such as monsoon changes or polar amplification

Extreme Event Attribution assesses the role of human influence in the likelihood of occurrence or intensity of extreme weather events (e.g. heat waves or droughts). Methods include:

- Probabilistic Event Attribution uses large ensembles of climate model simulations to compare observed events to model-generated counterfactuals
- Storyline Approach examines the physical processes driving an event and evaluates how anthropogenic forcings might have modified those processes

Formatted: Font: Italic

8.3 Attribution of global warming

Attribution statements for global warming in the three most recent IPCC Assessment reports are:

AR4: **Most of the observed increase** in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is *very likely* due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations. (IPCC 2007)

Formatted: Font: Bold

AR5: It is *extremely likely* that **more than half of the observed increase** in global average surface temperature from 1951 to 2010 was caused by the anthropogenic increase in greenhouse gas concentrations and other anthropogenic forcings together. The best estimate of the human- induced contribution to warming is similar to the observed warming over this period. (IPCC 2013)

Formatted: Font: Bold

AR6: The *likely* range of total human-caused global surface temperature increase from 1850–1900 to 2010–2019 is 0.8°C to 1.3°C, with a best estimate of 1.07°C. It is *likely* that well-mixed GHGs contributed a warming of 1.0°C to 2.0°C, other human drivers (principally aerosols) contributed a cooling of 0.0°C to 0.8°C, natural drivers changed global surface temperature by –0.1°C to +0.1°C, and internal variability changed it by –0.2°C to +0.2°C. It is *very likely* that **well-mixed GHGs were the main driver** of tropospheric warming since 1979. (IPCC 2021)

Formatted: Font: Bold

The AR4 and AR5 attribution statements reference the warming since the mid-20th century, the period when greenhouse gas emissions began rapidly increasing. The words “most” and “more than half” are deliberately imprecise, potentially ranging from 51 to 99% of the warming – presumably this imprecision is to account for structural uncertainties such as natural internal variability. The confidence level increases from *very likely* to *extremely likely* from AR4 to AR5. The structure of the attribution statement in the AR6 is fundamentally different, referencing the warming to the period 1850–1900. The AR6 attribution statement is more precise numerically, but with a lower level of confidence at “likely” – the AR6 attributes essentially all the warming to increases in greenhouse gases. The most confident statement from the AR6 relates to the tropospheric warming since 1979, using the words “main driver” and “*very likely*.”

There are three areas of substantive criticism of the IPCC’s assessment of the causes of the recent warming: inadequate assessment of natural climate variability, inappropriate statistical methods, and substantial discrepancies between models and observations. The last is discussed in Chapter 6, while this chapter discusses the first two factors. All of these criticisms are relevant to the IPCC’s policy-informing attribution of the recent warming, which also underpins extreme event attribution

8.3.1 Natural climate variability

IPCC AR6 states that natural external drivers since 1850–1900 have changed global surface temperature by –0.1°C to +0.1°C, and internal variability has changed it by –0.2°C to +0.2°C – on average having essentially no net impact on the warming since 1850–1900. As discussed below, this minimal contribution of natural variability has been disputed by several publications that question the magnitudes of solar variability and internal variability from large-scale ocean circulation.

Solar variability

IPCC AR5 concluded that the best estimate of radiative forcing due to Total Solar Irradiance (TSI) changes over the period 1750–2011 was very small (0.05 W/m², Myrhe *et al.*, 2014). IPCC AR6 acknowledges a much larger range of estimates of changes in TSI over the last several centuries, stating that the TSI between the Maunder Minimum (1645–1715) and the second half of the twentieth century increased by 0.7–2.7 W/m², a range that includes both low and high variability TSI data sets (Gulev, 2021).

However, the recommended forcing dataset for the CMIP6 climate model simulations used in AR6 for attribution studies averages two data sets with low solar variability (Matthes, 2017).

While AR6 shows a substantially greater solar impact than does AR5, the overall impact on the climate was still assessed to be small compared to anthropogenic forcing of climate change. However, the impact of solar variations on the climate is uncertain and subject to substantial debate - something that is not evident from the IPCC assessment reports (Lockwood, 2012; Connolly *et al.*, 2021).

The change of TSI over time remains a challenging problem. Since 1978, there have been direct measurements of TSI from satellites. However, the data exhibits non-negligible inconsistencies, and interpreting any multi-decadal trends in TSI requires comparisons of observations from overlapping satellites. There are several rival composite TSI datasets, disagreeing as to whether TSI increased or decreased during the period 1986–96 (the ACRIM gap; see Chapter 4). Further, the satellite record of TSI is used to calibrate proxy models, whereby past solar variations are inferred from sunspots and cosmogenic isotope measurements (Velasco Herrera *et al.*, 2015).

There is substantial evidence for high solar activity in the second half of the 20th century (starting in 1959) and extending into the 1990's, before a decline in the early 21st century; this period is often termed the “Modern Maximum.” (Chatzistergos *et al.*, 2023; Solanki *et al.*, 2004; Usoskin *et al.*, 2007). However, some scientists have concluded that it is not possible to be confident of any multi-decadal trend in TSI (Schmutz, 2021).

This uncertainty causes some reconstructions of TSI from 1750 to have low variability (implying a very low impact of solar variations on global mean surface temperature) whereas datasets with high TSI variability can explain more than 70% percent of the temperature variability since preindustrial times (Scafetta, 2013; Stefani, 2021). The choice of TSI satellite record used in an analysis can therefore substantially influence how much climate change is attributed to human versus natural forcings.

There is growing evidence that other aspects of solar variability, which are referred to as solar indirect effects, either amplify TSI forcing or are independent of TSI forcing. Scafetta *et al.* (2023) suggests that ~80% of solar influence on climate may stem from non-TSI mechanisms. There are numerous candidate processes, including solar ultraviolet changes; energetic particle precipitation; atmospheric-electric-field effect on cloud cover; cloud changes produced by solar-modulated galactic cosmic rays; large relative changes in the magnetic field; and the strength of the solar wind. Such solar indirect effects are not included in climate models, although indirect methods of estimating their impacts suggest they are significant. However, claims of non-TSI mechanisms influencing climate are uncertain and debated.

Natural variability of large-scale ocean circulations

Variations in global mean surface temperature are linked to recurrent large-scale variations in ocean circulation patterns, including the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation (AMO), the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) and the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO). These circulations influence ocean heat uptake and heat distribution, and also influence atmospheric circulation patterns and cloud distributions. There is some debate as to whether these variations are strictly internal to the climate system, or whether this variability can have a solar/astronomical origin or can be influenced by large volcanic eruptions.

While climate models simulate the large-scale ocean circulations and internal climate variability, most models show have too little amplitude compared to observations at multi-decadal frequencies and phasing out-of-sync with the observed climate (Kravtsov *et al.*, 2024). Averaging multiple simulations effectively averages out the internal variations, leaving only the forced climate variability (e.g., CO₂ forcing). With most of the modern warming beginning in the late 1970's, the recent 50-year warming is on the same time scale as the multi-decadal oscillations of the AMO and PDO.

Formatted: Font: Italic

Here are summary statements from the IPCC AR5 and AR6 reports:

AR5: Decadal variability in the Pacific, associated with the PDO or IPO [Interdecadal Pacific Oscillation], contributes significantly to regional and global temperature trends, but the relative contributions of internal variability and external forcing are difficult to disentangle in CMIP5 simulations.

AR6: Since AR5, there has been increased understanding of the role of internal variability, such as ENSO, PDO, and AMO, in modulating regional climate trends. However, limitations in simulating the exact timing and amplitude of these modes in CMIP6 models contribute to uncertainties in attributing observed changes to anthropogenic forcing (*high confidence*).

The amplitude of the peak-to-trough impact of the multi-decadal oscillations on global temperatures has been assessed by the IPCC AR6: “The likely range of change due to internal variability is -0.2°C to $+0.2^{\circ}\text{C}$ (IPCC, 2021).” This implies a trough-to-peak change of 0.4°C . Over many centuries, any global temperature changes from the troughs and peaks will cancel out, with little to no net impact.

However, with a nominal timescale of 60-80 years for oscillations such as the AMO and PDO, the timing of the peaks and troughs can be confused with the secular trend. This becomes very relevant for attributing the warming for the past 50 years, when most of the recent warming has occurred. Even if climate models have the correct amplitude of the multidecadal oscillations, the timing of the peaks and troughs is not adequately simulated, with each model and individual ensemble simulating a different phasing. Once the simulations of the ensemble members and different models are averaged, the natural internal variability contribution is averaged out, effectively cancelling the role of natural internal variability in the attribution process.

The time series of global surface temperature anomalies since 1850 (Figure 8.1) shows irregular variations of significant amplitude against the background of an overall warming trend and, after 1976, a pronounced difference in trends between the Northern Hemisphere and the Southern Hemisphere. The period between 1905-1945 shows a strong trend of warming. The following thirty years from 1945-1976 showed slightly declining temperatures. The most recent warming period started in 1977.

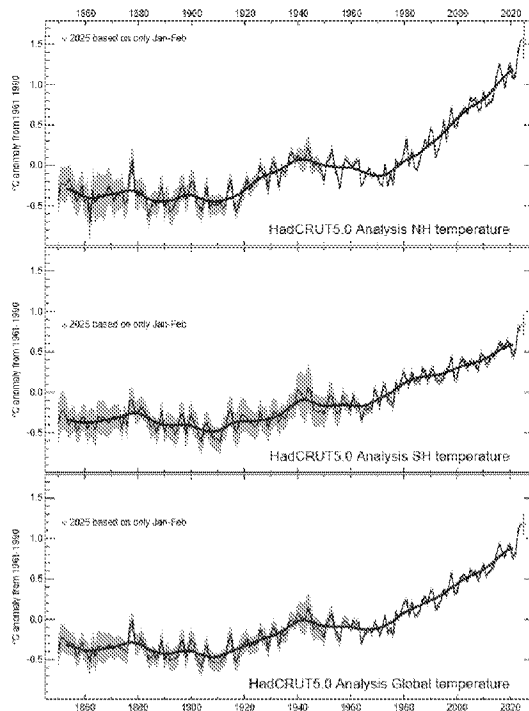


Figure 8.1 Global average surface temperature anomalies 1850—2025. Top: Northern hemisphere. Middle: Southern hemisphere. Bottom: Global average. Source: UK Hadley Centre [[HYPERLINK "https://crudata.uea.ac.uk/cru/data/temperature/HadCRUT5.0Analysis.pdf"](https://crudata.uea.ac.uk/cru/data/temperature/HadCRUT5.0Analysis.pdf)]

The causes of the early 20th century warming are discussed by Hegerl *et al.* (2017; 2019). The atmospheric CO₂ concentration increased from 298 ppm in 1905 to 310 ppm in 1941; hence this implies, implying that CO₂ had little impact on the warming. Volcanic activity during this period was very low, and solar forcing is uncertain. Yet Hegerl *et al.* (2017) somehow inferred that 40-54% of this warming could be attributed to external forcing, with the rest associated with internal variability. -Bronniman et al (2024) focused on the causes of the cooling in the first decade of the 20th century in the Southern Hemisphere. They found that the cooling was related to a La-Niña-like pattern in the Pacific, a cold tropical and subtropical South Atlantic, a cold extratropical South Pacific, and cool southern midlatitude land areas. The Southern Annular Mode was positive, with a strengthened Amundsen–Bellingshausen seas low, although the spread of the data products is considerable.

Formatted: Font: Italic

The warming in the 1930's and subsequent cooling during mid century was particularly pronounced in the Arctic. Bokuchava and Semenov (2021) find that most likely these variations were most likely caused by a combined effect of long-term natural climate variations in the North Atlantic and North Pacific with a contribution of the natural radiative forcing related to the reduced volcanic activity and variations of solar activity as well as growing greenhouse gases concentrations. Tokinaga et al (2017) showed that the combined effect of internally generated Pacific and Atlantic interdecadal variability intensified Arctic

warming in the early 20th century. The synchronized Pacific-Atlantic warming drastically alters planetary-scale circulations over the Northern Hemisphere; these same circulation patterns have a global influence.

The cooling period between 1945 and 1976 has been referred to as the “grand hiatus.” Numerous causes have been hypothesized: natural internal variability from fluctuations associated with the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) and Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation; cooling from increased emissions of aerosols from industrial activities; increased heat uptake in the Atlantic, Southern and Equatorial Pacific Oceans. Thompson *et al.* (2010) find that the hemispheric differences in temperature trends in the middle of the twentieth century stem largely from a rapid drop in Northern Hemisphere sea surface temperatures of about 0.3 °C between about 1968 and 1972.

The Great Pacific Climate Shift of 1976-1977 was a notable climatic event characterized by an abrupt change in the North Pacific Ocean's atmosphere-ocean system that interacted with global climate patterns. This shift is closely associated with the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) that oscillates between warm and cool phases over decades. The 1976 shift marked a transition from a predominantly negative (cool) PDO phase (1947–1976) to a positive (warm) phase (1977 through 2000), with significant implications for global and regional climate patterns including the frequencies of El Niño and La Niña events. The Great Pacific Climate Shift coincided with the beginning of a period of accelerated global warming. When the Great Pacific Climate Shift is accounted for in climate attribution analyses since 1950, 40 percent or more of the warming in the second half of the 20th century is attributed to natural internal variability (McLean *et al.*, 2009; Tung and Zhou, 2013; Chylek *et al.*, 2016; Scafetta, 2021).

8.3.2 Optimal fingerprinting

Optimal fingerprinting is a statistical technique introduced by Allen and Tett (1999) that compares observed climate data to climate model simulations to identify patterns (or “fingerprints”) associated with human or natural forcing. It involves taking a vector of observed climate changes, such as warming rates in locations around the world, and decomposing them into a weighted sum of “signals”, which are analogues to the observations generated by climate models with different types of forcings. The weights are chosen using a regression method called Total Least Squares. The analysis commonly uses just two signals, one generated by models using only anthropogenic forcings and one using only natural forcings. If the estimated weighting coefficient attached to a signal is significantly different from zero, then that signal is said to be “detected”. If it is close to 1.0, then the model generating the signal is said to be consistent with observations. If it is less than 1.0, then the model signal for that forcing is too strong and needs to be scaled down, and vice-versa. Both the observed data and the signals are weighted using a model-generated estimate of patterns of randomness in the climate system so as, in principle, to put maximum weight on regions where natural variability is minimized.

Optimal fingerprinting is the primary tool for attribution in the research literature. While it has been widely used and prominently featured by the IPCC since 2001, there is very little literature examining the statistical properties of the results it generates. One of its inherent weaknesses is that results depend on assumptions about the accuracy of climate models, especially regarding their representation of natural variability (IPCC AR5 Ch 10.2.3).

A series of papers by McKittrick (McKittrick 2021, 2022, 2023, 2025) has challenged the optimal fingerprinting method, arguing that it is inherently unreliable and that practices adopted from econometrics can provide more valid results. Statistical theory requires that for regression models to yield unbiased coefficients, a set of assumptions called the Gauss-Markov conditions must hold. McKittrick (2021) argued that the Allen and Tett (1999) methodology violates the Gauss-Markov conditions, leading to potentially biased and inconsistent fingerprinting coefficients, undermining the reliability of the method. Chen *et al.* (2023) confirmed this analysis and argued that the method could yield unbiased results, but only under very stringent assumptions. McKittrick (2022) and (2023) raised a further concern that climate scientists—virtually

alone among scientific disciplines—have used an estimation method called Total Least Squares (TLS) to estimate anthropogenic greenhouse gas signal coefficients, despite its tendency to be unreliable unless some strong assumptions hold that in practice are unlikely to be true. Under conditions that easily arise in optimal fingerprinting, TLS yields estimates with have a large positive biases. Thus, any study that used TLS for optimal fingerprinting without verifying its applicability in the specific data context has likely overstated the result attribution.

McKittrick (2025) presented an empirical example comparing the results of conventional optimal fingerprinting against methods drawn from mainstream econometrics that are known to be valid for the specific application of signal detection. While the IPCC optimal fingerprinting method yields an anthropogenic signal coefficient close to 1.0 on a global temperature data set spanning 1900 to 2010, consistent estimation yields a coefficient around 0.4, which rises to about 0.65 on data spanning 1980 to 2010, implying the model response to greenhouse gases needs to be scaled down by about half to optimally match observations. The natural forcing signal coefficient, by contrast, is between 2.0 and 4.0, implying the climate model signals of natural forcing need to be scaled up two-to four-fold to match observed climate change. The fingerprinting coefficients estimated in McKittrick (2025), when used to scale the average sensitivity of the climate models used to generate the forcing signals in his data set, imply a Transient Climate Sensitivity of 1.4°C, which is consistent with the estimate by Lewis (2023) using a different estimation method and multiple independent data sets.

While these analyses do not falsify all results stemming from the IPCC optimal fingerprinting method, they do challenge the basis on which they were believed to be correct.

8.3.3 Time series methods

The IPCC (AR5 WGI 10.2.2) drew attention to alternative approaches of assessing causality that emerged from the time series econometrics literature. These have the advantage of not depending on assumptions about the accuracy of climate models, but the disadvantage that they depend on difficult-to-test assumptions about the data generating process underlying climate and forcing data. The methods, now referred to as climate econometrics, use the tools of unit root testing, Granger causality and cointegration analysis, all of which are familiar in economics and finance and which are slowly being adopted in climate science. Time series analysis methods hold out the possibility of determining whether anthropogenic or natural forcings are the primary drivers of climate change without requiring the use of climate models, although key questions remain unsettled (e.g. Dergiades *et al.*, 2016, Balcombe *et al.*, 2019, Dagsvik *et al.*, 2020, Razzak, 2022, Dagsvik and Moen, 2023).

“Granger causality” modeling is a tool for determining directions of influence in data series that move together. It is a statistical, not a physical, concept. If knowing the current value of one variable significantly improves the forecast accuracy of another variable, we can infer a causal connection exists; this is called Granger causality. The modeling tools, called vector autoregression, measure direct impulse-response patterns and feedbacks. An application to the well-known Vostok ice core data revealed an error in Al Gore’s documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. Gore showed the data and drew attention to the coherence of temperature and CO₂ changes over a 440,000 year span, which he asserted was due to CO₂ driving temperature changes. But temperature changes can also affect atmospheric CO₂ levels. Davidson *et al.* (2015) examined the series and found that temperature Granger causes CO₂ but not the reverse. In other words, on the time scales represented in the Vostok data the coherence in the series is primarily due to the influence of temperature on CO₂ levels, not the feedback of CO₂ levels on temperature.

In summary, the primary statistical methods for attributing causation in climate data are optimal fingerprinting and time series analysis. Applications of the Allen and Tett (1999) optimal fingerprinting method dominate the attribution literature and have underpinned past IPCC conclusions, but results depend

on the accuracy of climate models and the method has recently been criticized as inherently biased. Time series methods do not depend on climate models but require assumptions of their own and have generated results that have thus far not converged on a consensus.

8.4 Declining planetary albedo and recent record warmth

A sharp recent increase in global average temperatures has raised the question of short-term drivers of climate. One such candidate is the fraction of absorbed solar radiation which has also ~~changed-increased~~ abruptly in recent years. The question to be answered is whether the change is an internal feedback to warming caused by greenhouse gases or whether something else ~~changed-increased~~ the fraction of absorbed radiation which then caused the recent warming.

The albedo is the fraction of incoming solar radiation that is reflected back into space rather than being absorbed by the planet. Highly reflective surfaces like cloud tops and snow and ice are most important in this regard. The Earth's albedo is approximately 30%, meaning almost a third of the sunlight that reaches Earth is directly reflected back to space. A lower albedo implies more solar energy is absorbed by the planet to be then re-radiated as heat. Hence, other things being equal, a decline in albedo is associated with a warming of the Earth.

Arguably the most striking change in the Earth's climate system during the 21st century is a significant reduction in planetary albedo since 2015, which has coincided with at least two years of record global warmth. Figure 8.2 shows the planetary albedo variations since 2000, when there are good satellite observations. The 0.5% reduction in planetary albedo since 2015 corresponds to an increase of 1.7 W/m² in absorbed solar energy averaged over the planet (Hansen and Karecha, 2025). For comparison, the IPCC estimate of forcing from the increase in atmospheric CO₂ compared to preindustrial times is approximately 2.2 W/m² (Figure 3.1.2).

Looking back prior to 2000 with less adequate data, Goessling *et al.* (2025) assessed that planetary albedo was relatively low around the 1940's and 50's, before rising in industrial aerosol precursor emissions increased albedo until the 1980's. The strongest planetary albedo excursions were high-albedo episodes caused by volcanic eruptions, such as after the Mount Pinatubo eruption in 1991. Although uncertain, the 2023 planetary albedo minimum may have been the lowest since at least 1940.

Changes in surface characteristics can't explain this decrease in planetary albedo since 2015:

- Arctic sea ice extent has declined by about 5% since 1980 (https://nsidc.org/data/seaice_index/images/s_plot_hires.png), although following 2007 there has been a pause in the Arctic sea ice decline (England *et al.*, 2025)
- Regarding Antarctic sea ice, the IPCC AR6 concludes that "There has been no significant trend in Antarctic sea ice area from 1979 to 2020 due to regionally opposing trends and large internal variability." (Summary for Policymakers, A.1.5)
- Northern hemispheric annual snow cover has been slowly declining since 1967, with barely significant trends. The data show the Northern Hemisphere has snowier winters, accompanied by more rapid melt in spring and summer. [[HYPERLINK "http://climate.rutgers.edu/snowcover/"](http://climate.rutgers.edu/snowcover/)]
- Global greening (Chapter 2) is contributing to the decrease in planetary albedo, as forests have a lower albedo than open lands or snow. However, there is some evidence that forests increase cloud cover (high reflectivity), which counteracts the direct albedo increase associated with increasing forested area.

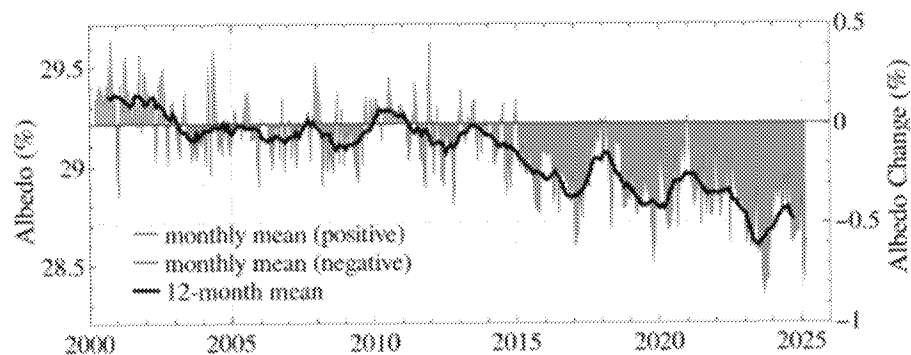


Figure 8.2. Earth's albedo (reflectivity, in percent), with seasonality removed. From Hansen and Karecha (2025)

Changes in surface reflectivity are contributing to a small, slow decline in planetary albedo. However, these changes cannot explain the sharp decline in planetary albedo beginning in 2015. Further, any changes in surface albedo are effectively damped by about a factor 3 on average, primarily due to cloud masking (Loeb *et al.* 2019). Surface albedo changes have thus contributed only weakly to the recent planetary albedo decline, particularly when averaged annually and globally.

This leaves the most likely explanation for the sharp albedo decline as changes in atmospheric aerosols and/or clouds.

Aerosols are small particles in the atmosphere that reflect sunlight and can interact with cloud processes to make the clouds more reflective. Aerosols have both natural origins (e.g. dust from soils, wildfires) as well as human origins from combustion (including fossil fuels). Regions that are greening and/or have an increase in rainfall may be producing less dust. For anthropogenic aerosols, new ship fuel regulations aimed at reducing sulfur emissions were implemented in three phases, in 2010, 2015 and 2020. Sulfate particles reflect solar radiation. Cleaner air means less solar radiation is reflected, which contributes to surface warming. Indirect effects of sulfate aerosols include increasing the reflectivity of low-level clouds in the subtropics. There is controversy surrounding the importance of this change in sulfate emissions to the Earth's radiation balance (Hodnebrog *et al.*, 2024; Yuan *et al.*, 2024), but the restriction of this effect to major shipping routes suggests a small global impact (Schmidt, 2024).

Changes in clouds are the primary candidate to explain the decline in global albedo since 2015. Two recent papers (Loeb *et al.*, 2024; Goessling *et al.* 2024) have addressed recent variations in cloud properties. By considering satellite and reanalysis data, Loeb *et al.* found that decreases in low and mid-level clouds since 2015 are the primary reason for decreasing planetary albedo in the Northern hemisphere, whereas in the Southern hemisphere the decrease in planetary albedo is primarily due to decreases in mid-level clouds across all latitude zones. Goessling *et al.* (2024) found that cloud anomalies were mainly due to reduced low-level clouds. Regions with coherent low-level cloud reductions over the past decade include the warm pool region around the Maritime Continent and the northern extratropical western Pacific, as well as large parts of the Atlantic and adjacent land regions. The reduction of global cloud cover identified in these analyses since 2015 is 1-2 percent.

The question then becomes what caused the change in cloud cover. Two causes have been posited for the declining cloud cover over the past decade:

- Natural climate variability
- Changes in low cloud cover associated with warming sea surface temperatures, implying an emerging positive feedback to climate change (Hansen and Karecha, 2025)

The existence of a new positive low cloud feedback that began emerging in 2015 is not easy to justify. However, there are numerous natural climate signals during this period that are associated with atmospheric circulation changes that can influence the distribution of clouds:

- The 2014-2016 was the strongest El Niño event on record
- A cold anomaly beginning in 2015 in the subpolar gyre of the North Atlantic reflects a shift in the ocean circulation pattern associated with decadal variability in the Atlantic (Frajka-Williams *et al.*, 2017; Arthur *et al.*, 2021).
- The Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) positive index peaked in 2016, then declined and has been in negative territory since late 2019
- Eruption of the submarine Hunga-Tonga volcano in 2022

Interannual cloud anomalies associated with the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) have a significant global signal and strong regional signals especially over the tropical Indian and Pacific Oceans.

The Hunga Tonga eruption is remarkable in its coincidence with the exceptionally low value of planetary albedo in 2023. Goessling *et al.* (2024) found that the cloud perturbations in 2023 showed a different pattern from the overall pattern since 2015, with reduced cloud cover being most pronounced in the northern hemisphere and tropics. Regional reductions in cloud cover were most pronounced over the eastern Indian Ocean, over South America and extending over the eastern Pacific, as well as over northern North America, in the Southern Ocean around 60S, in the subtropical and eastern North Atlantic, and in parts of the North Pacific.

The Hunga Tonga eruption was unusual in that it injected large amounts of water vapor into the stratosphere, in addition to sulfate particles. Early publications focused on the impacts to stratospheric circulations and the direct radiative impact. In 2025, papers are emerging that examine the indirect effects of Hunga Tonga on surface climate using ensemble simulations from earth system models (Bednarczyk *et al.*, 2025; Kuchar *et al.*, 2025). These papers found statistically significant impacts on regional climates that were driven by circulation changes from couplings between the stratosphere and troposphere. These papers indicate the complex interactions between volcanic activity and climate dynamics. More research is needed to untangle any impacts of Hunga Tonga eruption on planetary albedo.

In summary, the decline in planetary albedo and the concurrent decline in cloudiness have emphasized the importance of clouds and their variations to global climate variability and change. A change of 1 to 2 percent in global cloud cover has a greater radiative impact on the climate than the direct radiative effect of doubling CO₂. While it is difficult to untangle causes of the trend, the competing explanations for the cause of the declining cloud cover have substantial implications for assessing the Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity and also for the attribution of the recent warming. An additional 10 years of data should help clarify whether this is a strong positive cloud feedback associated with warming, or a temporary fluctuation driven by natural variability

8.5 Attribution of climate impact drivers

The IPCC (Ranasinghe *et al.*, 2021) defines “climate impact drivers” or CIDs as “physical climate system conditions (e.g., means, events, extremes) that affect an element of society or ecosystems.” Hence CIDs are those features of the weather and climate system of primary interest in assessing the impacts of

climate change since they potentially affect humans and the natural world. For instance, under the heading “Heat and Cold,” CIDs are identified as mean air temperature, extreme heat, cold spells and frost. The IPCC also points out that CIDs are not necessarily harm-related: depending on the system in question they can be detrimental, neutral, beneficial or a combination.

The first column of Table 12.12 in Ranasinghe *et al.* (2021, p. 1856), reproduced here as Table 8.1, summarizes the AR6 assessment of whether a signal of attributable anthropogenic influence has emerged across all major CIDs. One of the themes of this chapter is that attribution methods used by the IPCC tend to overstate the anthropogenic influence and understate the role of natural variability. Nonetheless a striking feature of that summary table is how few CIDs exhibit an anthropogenic signal sufficient to distinguish them from natural variability.

Out of the 33 weather impact categories an anthropogenic signal is asserted with *high confidence* in only five, and with *medium confidence* in a further four. (Note that one of the CIDs is an increase in CO₂ levels, and since it is a tautology to attribute this to increased CO₂ levels this CID can be ignored.) For the rest the IPCC does not claim to have detected anthropogenic drivers. Of the five *high confidence assertions*, two are for changes in average temperatures (air and ocean) hence are not measures of extreme weather. ~~Also~~ Further, two of the four *medium confidence assertions* are related to ocean chemistry and thus are likewise not related to extreme weather. The IPCC does not assert a human influence on many non-temperature weather features such as wind, precipitation, flooding, drought etc.

Columns 2 and 3 of IPCC Table 12.12 report on whether anthropogenic signals are expected to emerge this century under RCP8.5, the most extreme forcing scenario. We have omitted these columns for several reasons. First, because they refer to whether or not climate models project detectable signals in the observations, which is a very different question than our concern here, -whether a signal has been detected in historical data. Second, as we discuss in Chapter 4, the RCP8.5 scenario is a misleading and implausible high-end storyline, it is not a “base case” or business-as-usual projection. Third, the ensemble of detailed models is acknowledged (Palmer and Stevens 2019) to be “not fit for purpose” in describing regional changes and “unable to represent future conditions at the degree of spatial, temporal, and probabilistic precision with which projections are often provided.” (Nissan et al, 2019)). Even with these caveats, we note that the omitted columns in AR6 Table 12.12 ~~indicate show~~ most weather impacts are not expected to exhibit an anthropogenic signal this century.

Climatic impact-driver Type	Climatic impact-driver Category	Already Emerged in Historical Period
Heat and Cold	Mean air temperature	1
	Extreme heat	4
	Cold spell	4
	Frost	
Wet and Dry	Mean precipitation	
	River flood	
	Heavy precipitation and pluvial flood	
	Landslide	
	Aridity	
	Hydrological drought	
	Agricultural and ecological drought	
	Fire weather	
Wind	Mean wind speed	
	Severe wind storm	
	Tropical cyclone	
	Sand and dust storm	
Snow and Ice	Snow, glacier and ice sheet	
	Permafrost	
	Lake, river and sea ice	11
	Heavy snowfall and ice storm	
	Hail	
	Snow avalanche	
Coastal	Relative sea level	
	Coastal flood	
	Coastal erosion	
Open Ocean	Mean ocean temperature	
	Marine heatwave	
	Ocean acidity	
	Ocean salinity	13
	Dissolved oxygen	14
Other	Air pollution weather	
	Atmospheric CO ₂ at surface	
	Radiation at surface	

High confidence of decrease	Medium confidence of decrease	Low confidence in direction of change	Medium confidence of increase	High confidence of increase
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------------------	-------------------------------	-----------------------------

Table 8.1: Reproduction of column 1 of Table 12.12, IPCC AR6 Working Group I report. Emergence of anthropogenic signal in historical period for CIDs shown. White: no signal detected. Blue and orange: change detected (decrease or increase) and confidence level as indicated in color legend.

As discussed in Chapter 7 natural variability dominates patterns of extreme weather systems and simplistic assertions of trend detection are frequently undermined by regional heterogeneity and trend reversals over time. Table 8.1 makes the related point that, again contrary to popular belief, attribution of changes in most extreme weather types to human influence is not currently possible. Taking wind as an example, the IPCC claims that an anthropogenic signal has not emerged in average wind speeds, severe windstorms, tropical cyclones or sand and dust storms, nor is one expected to emerge this century even under an extreme emissions scenario. The same applies to drought and fire weather.

8.6 Extreme event attribution (EEA)

Examining the IPCC's treatment of extreme weather and climate event attribution more broadly, the AR6 provides an ambiguous assessment of the role of anthropogenic warming that differs between chapters. Chapter 11 of WG1 states (Seneviratne *et al.*, 2021):

Evidence of observed changes in extremes and their attribution to human influence (including greenhouse gas and aerosol emissions and land-use changes) has strengthened since AR5, in particular for extreme precipitation, droughts, tropical cyclones and compound extremes (including dry/hot events and fire weather). Some recent hot extreme events would have been extremely unlikely to occur without human influence on the climate system.

By contrast, as noted above, Chapter 12 of WG1 (Table 12.12) paints a different picture – presumably, the expert judgment of different groups of authors for the two chapters came to different conclusions (Ranasinghe, 2021):

- High confidence in an increase in extreme heat events in tropical regions where observations allow trend estimation and in most regions in the mid-latitudes, medium confidence elsewhere
- Medium confidence in a decrease in extreme cold events in Australia, Africa and most of northern South America where observations allow trend estimation
- No evidence of emergence in the historical period of a change in river floods, heavy precipitation, drought, fire weather, severe wind storms, and tropical cyclones

While the overall issue of detecting changes in extreme weather events and their attribution remains ambiguous, most of the activity in this area relates to the attribution of particular extreme weather events. The most prominent effort is World Weather Attribution (WWA; worldweatherattribution.org), an international research initiative for extreme event attribution that purports to analyze how climate change influences the likelihood and intensity of extreme weather events. Their approach is to use large ensembles of regional climate models to compare the an event in today's climate with one in a counterfactual pre-industrial climate without human influences.

WWA has a prominent public presence in linking extreme weather to climate change, with its press releases attracting considerable attention in public and policy discussions. However, the WWA's extensive promotion of non-peer-reviewed findings, its funding ties, its open admission to shaping analyses to serve litigation, and its methodological challenges have sparked controversies, with critics questioning the robustness and impartiality of their conclusions (Pielke Jr. 2024). Despite these issues, WWA's work continues to influence climate science and media narratives. Technical criticisms of the approach include a lack of a formal detection process; an implicit assumption that 100% of the post-industrial warming is caused by greenhouse gases; and a failure to adequately account for internal climate variability.

Because EEA is relatively new many basic methodological issues have yet to be settled in the expert literature. An important challenge is the lack of data. Extreme events are, by definition, rare. Many analyses of extreme event types (including the US National Assessment Reports) only evaluate data since 1950 or 1970. However, as emphasized by Chapter 7, many of the worst extreme weather and climate events in U.S. history occurred prior to the first half of the 20th century, including in the early 19th century. And if paleoclimate reconstructions are considered, it becomes very difficult for an event to pass the detection thresholds of exceeding what is expected from natural variability, particularly if a reasonably sized geographic region is considered.

Another challenge is defining the event under study. There is a longstanding literature in statistics and econometrics on the challenge of analyzing data with outliers. The issue arises because a data series establishes a probability distribution defining the expected range of observations. If an outlier is observed it might indicate that the underlying process giving rise to the data distribution has changed (which in the weather context would mean that a climate change has been detected) or that the underlying process has multiple regimes each with a different probability distribution, in which case observing an outlier simply means we were temporarily in a different regime, but the system itself was unchanged. If a time series contains only a single outlier event at the end of the series it is not possible to determine which model is the correct one (Chen and Liu 1993). For instance, there might be an “ordinary” weather regime that yields a distribution of summer daytime highs in a particular coastal region, and a second “heatwave” regime that kicks in when an inland blocking event occurs, which yields a temperature distribution centered 15°C higher than the first one. A day with temperatures 13°C above normal would either be an extreme heat anomaly under the first regime or a somewhat cool event under the second, and we have no way in this case of knowing on statistical grounds which view is correct.

Visser and Petersen (2012) and Sardeshmukh *et al.* (2015) both point out that different distributions may fit observed data equally well but yield very different implications about the likelihood of a specific weather event. Visser and Petersen argue that, in view of the deep uncertainties of extreme weather analysis, drawing a connection between individual events and global climate change should be avoided. Furthermore, the existence of an outlier at the end of a data series poses the problem that estimates of the event probabilities will be biased whether the outlier is included or excluded (Barlow *et al.*, 2020). Methods to eliminate the bias have not yet been established, leading some experts (e.g. Miralles and Davison 2023) to argue that in settings in which a data series contains a single extreme event at the end, estimation of a return period for the extreme event will be so biased and uncertain that it should be avoided altogether.

In spite of these concerns, the U.S. is presently considering something like the WWA, which is being investigated by a NASEM Panel on Attribution of Extreme Weather and Climate Events and their impacts (NASEM, 2025).

We provide a case study of a recent high impact extreme event in the U.S. to illustrate the challenges and ambiguities in attributing the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events to human-caused warming.

8.6.1 Case study – 2021 Western North America heat wave

The 2021 Western North America heat wave was an extreme event that affected much of Western North America in late June 2021. In particular, surface temperature records were set in Portland, OR (116°F; previous record 107°F) and Seattle, WA (108 °F; previous record 103°F) (Mass *et al.*, 2024).

The WWA team generated international headlines with their analysis, which provided the following attribution statements (WWA, 2021; Philip *et al.*, 2022):

- Based on observations and modeling, the occurrence of this heatwave was virtually impossible without human-caused climate change.

- The event is estimated to be about a 1 in 1000-year event in today's climate.
- The event would have been at least 150 times rarer without human-induced climate change.
- This heatwave was about 2°C hotter than it would have been if it had occurred at the beginning of the industrial revolution (when global mean temperatures were 1.2°C cooler than today).

But an important counter to the first claim is that other researchers concluded from historical weather data that while a heat wave of the magnitude observed was indeed virtually impossible without anthropogenic climate change, it was also virtually impossible *with* climate change. Bercos-Hickey (2022) noted “these temperatures were virtually impossible under any previously experienced meteorological conditions, with or without global warming.” McKinnon and Simpson (2022) stated “the most likely explanation remains that the weather event itself was ‘bad luck.’” The 2023 Oregon Climate Assessment (Fleischman, 2023) concluded that the heat dome would have formed even without climate change and “There is no evidence that the highly unusual combination of weather features that drove the heat dome were made more likely by climate change, and climate models do not project an increase in the frequency of high-pressure ridges over the Pacific Northwest” (Fleischman, 2023, p. 49).

Mass ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2024) summarizes the proximate sequence of compound events leading to the heat wave. There was a record-breaking mid-tropospheric ridge over the Pacific Northwest, forced by a tropical disturbance in the western Pacific. This produced record-breaking mid-tropospheric temperatures, strong subsidence in the lower atmosphere, low-level easterly flow that produced downslope warming on regional terrain and the removal of cooler marine air, and an approaching low-level trough that enhanced downslope flow. The event occurred at a time of maximum solar insolation, and drier-than-normal soil moisture. Using a storyline approach, Mass ~~et al.~~ *et al.* assessed that there is no trend in drought and dry soils in the Pacific Northwest; there is no evidence of global warming producing stronger ridges of high pressure, and no observed trend in heat waves or record temperatures in the region. They concluded that although anthropogenic warming ~~may~~ *might* have contributed as much as 2°F to the magnitude of the event, there is little evidence of further amplification of the event from increasing greenhouse gases.

Bercos-Hickey ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2022) conducted a statistical analysis of a model-based attribution study of this heat wave. Because the event is a far outlier and far above the bounds of Generalized Extreme Value distributions fitted from historical data, they concluded that estimates of return times, quantitative changes in event magnitude and frequency, and probability of the extreme temperatures such as provided by the WWA are not accurate and should be interpreted as having low confidence. They found that hindcast attribution methods using an ensemble of regional climate models, combined with Pearl (2009) causal inferences, can provide limited and conditional information about the magnitude of the human influence on this heatwave - they provided a more highly constrained estimate that human activities caused a ~1.4°F–1.8°F increase in the daily maximum temperatures.

Zeder ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2023) also concluded that the methods employed by Philip ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2022, the WWA analysis) tend to overstate the rarity of extreme heat waves, leading to a biased perception of the effect of climate change on the heatwave event: “The tendency to overestimate the return period of observed extreme heatwave events may fuel the impression that seemingly impossible heatwave extremes are currently clustering at an unprecedented rate.”

The 2021 Western North America heatwave was a rare and unprecedented compound weather event that broke century-old temperature records by as much as 9°F. While the WWA team received worldwide publicity for their rapid attribution claims blaming anthropogenic climate change, subsequent peer-reviewed analyses showed that the event was caused by rare meteorological conditions that were not made more probable by global warming.

References

- Allen, M. R., & Tett, S. F. B. (1999). Checking for model consistency in optimal fingerprinting. *Climate Dynamics*, 15(6), 419–434. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s003820050291>"]
- AR4: *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report* (2021) Working Group I Contribution. [HYPERLINK "<http://www.ipcc.ch>"].
- AR5: *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report* (2021) Working Group I Contribution. [HYPERLINK "<http://www.ipcc.ch>"].
- AR6: *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report* (2021) Working Group I Contribution. [HYPERLINK "<http://www.ipcc.ch>"].
- Arthun, M, RCJ Willis, HL Johnson, L Chafik, HR Langehaug (2021) Mechanisms of Decadal North Atlantic Climate Variability and Implications for the Recent Cold Anomaly. *Journal of Climate*, Vol 34
- Balcombe, Kevin, Iain Fraser and Abhijit Sharma (2019) Is radiative forcing cointegrated with temperature? A further examination using a structural time series approach." *Management of Environmental Quality* 30(5) DOI 10.1108/MEQ-12-2018-021.
- Barlow, Anna Maria, Chris Sherlock and Jonathan Tawn (2020) Inference for Extreme Values Under Threshold-Based Stopping Rules. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series C* August 2020, Pages 765–789, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1111/rssc.12420>"]
- Bednarz, EW, AH Butler, X Wang, Z Zhou, W Yu, G Stenchikov, M Toohey, Y Zhu (2025) Indirect climate impacts of the Hunga eruption. Preprint, <https://doi.org/10.5194/egusphere-2025-1970>
- Bercos-Hickey, E., ~~et al.~~ (2022). Anthropogenic contributions to the 2021 Pacific Northwest heatwave. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 49(23), e2022GL099396. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2022GL099396>"]
- Bokuchava, DD and VV Semenov (2021) Mechanisms of the early 20th century warming in the Arctic. *Earth-Science Reviews*, 222, 103820
- Chatzistergos, T., Krivova, N. A., & Yeo, K. L. (2023). Long-term changes in solar activity and irradiance. *Journal of Atmospheric and Solar-Terrestrial Physics*, 252, 106150. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jastp.2023.106150>"]
- Chen, C., & Liu, L.-M. (1993). Joint estimation of model parameters and outlier effects in time series. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 88(421), 284–297. [HYPERLINK "<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2290724>"]
- Chen, L., J.J. Dolado, J. Gonzalo and A. Ramos (2023) Heterogeneous predictive association of CO2 with global warming. *Economica* 2023 90:1397–1421 DOI: 10.1111/ecca.12491
- Chylek, P., ~~et al.~~ (2016). The role of Atlantic Multi-Decadal Oscillation in the global mean temperature variability. *Climate Dynamics*, 47(9–10), 3271–3279. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-016-3025-7>"]
- Connolly, R., ~~et al.~~ (2021). How much has the sun influenced Northern Hemisphere temperature trends? An ongoing debate. *Research in Astronomy and Astrophysics*, 21(6), 131. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1088/1674-4527/21/6/131>"]
- Cramer, W., ~~et al.~~ (2014). Detection and attribution of observed impacts. In C. B. Field ~~et al.~~ (Eds.), *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects* (pp. 979–1037). Cambridge University Press.
- Dagsvik, JK SH Moen (2023) To what extent are temperature levels changing due to greenhouse gas emissions? Statistics Norway Discussion Paper 1007 September 2023
- Dagsvik, JK, M Fortuna and SH Moen (2020) How Does Temperature Vary Over Time?: Evidence on the Stationary and Fractal Nature of Temperature Fluctuations. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*

- Series A: Statistics in Society*, Volume 183, Issue 3, June 2020, Pages 883–908, [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1111/rssa.12557"](https://doi.org/10.1111/rssa.12557)]
- Davidson, James E.H., David B. Stephenson and Alemtsehai A. Turasie (2015) Time series modeling of paleoclimate data *Environmetrics* 27(1) [[HYPERLINK "https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/env.2373"](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/env.2373)]
- Dergiades, T., R.K. Kaufmann and T. Panagiotidis (2016). Long-run changes in radiative forcing and surface temperature: The effect of human activity over the last five centuries. *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management* 76:67–85. [[HYPERLINK "https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0095069615000911"](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0095069615000911)]
- England, Mark, Lorenzo M Polvani, James A Screen, et al (2025). Surprising, but not unexpected, multi-decadal pause in Arctic sea ice loss. *ESS Open Archive*. March 29, 2025.
- Fleishman, E., editor. (2023). Sixth Oregon Climate Assessment. Oregon Climate Change Research Institute, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon. [[HYPERLINK "https://blogs.oregonstate.edu/occri/oregon-climate-assessments"](https://blogs.oregonstate.edu/occri/oregon-climate-assessments)]
- Frajka-Williams, E, C Beaulieu, Aurelie Duchez (2017) Emerging negative Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation index in spite of warm subtropics. *Scientific Reports*, 7:11224
- Goessling, Helge F. Thomas Rackow and Thomas Jung (2024) Recent global temperature surge intensified by record-low planetary albedo. *Science* Vol 387, Issue 6729 pp. 68-73 [[HYPERLINK "https://www.science.org/doi/abs/10.1126/science.adq7280"](https://www.science.org/doi/abs/10.1126/science.adq7280)]
- Gulev, S. K., et al. (2021). Changing state of the climate system. In V. Masson-Delmotte et al. (Eds.), *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (pp. 287–422). Geneva: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- Hansen J and P Karecha (2025) Large cloud feedback confirms high sensitivity.
- Hegerl, G. C., et al. (2007). Understanding and attributing climate change. In S. Solomon et al. (Eds.), *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (pp. 663–745). Cambridge University Press.
- Hegerl, GC, S Bronniman, A Schurer et al. (2017) Early 20th century warming: Anomalies, causes and consequences. *WIREs Climate Change*, DOI: 10.1002/wcc.522
- Hegerl, GC, S Bronniman, T Cowan (2019) Causes of climate change over the historical record. *Environmental Research Letters*, 14, 123006
- Hodnebrog, Ø et al. (2024), Recent reductions in aerosol emissions have increased Earth's energy imbalance. *Communications Earth and Environment* 5, 166 (2024). doi:10.1038/s43247-024-01324-8
- Houghton, J. T., et al. (Eds.). (2001). *Climate Change 2001: The Scientific Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (pp. 1–881). Cambridge University Press.
- [[HYPERLINK "https://mailchi.mp/caa/large-cloud-feedback-confirms-high-climate-sensitivity"](https://mailchi.mp/caa/large-cloud-feedback-confirms-high-climate-sensitivity)]
- Kravtsov, S, Westgate, A., & Gavrilo, A. (2024). Global-scale multidecadal variability in climate models and observations, part II: The stadium wave. *Climate Dynamics*, 62, 10281–10306. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-024-07451-4"](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-024-07451-4)]
- Kuchar, A., Sukhodolov, T., Chiodo, G., Jörmann, A., Kult-Herdin, J., Rozanov, E., and Rieder, H. H. (2025): Modulation of the northern polar vortex by the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai eruption and the associated surface response, *Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics*, 25, 3623–3634, [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.5194/acp-25-3623-2025"](https://doi.org/10.5194/acp-25-3623-2025)].

- Lewis, Nicholas (2023) “Objectively Combining Climate Sensitivity Evidence,” *Climate Dynamics* 61, no. 9–10 (2023): 3155–3163, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-022-06398-8>"].
- Lockwood, M. (2012). Solar influence on global and regional climates. *Surveys in Geophysics*, 33(3–4), 503–534. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10712-012-9181-3>"]
- Loeb, N. G. ~~et al.~~ (2019) Decomposing Shortwave Top-of-Atmosphere and Surface Radiative Flux Variations in Terms of Surface and Atmospheric Contributions. *Journal of Climate* 32(16), 5003–5019 (2019). doi:10.1175/JCLI-D-18-0826.1
- Loeb, N., S-H Ham, RP Allen, T J Thorsen, B Meyssignac, SKato, GC Johnson, JL Lyman (2024) Observational Assessment of Changes in Earth’s Energy Budget since 2000. *Surveys in Geophysics*, 45, 1757-1783
- Mass, C., ~~et al.~~ (2024). The Pacific Northwest heat wave of 25–30 June 2021: Synoptic/mesoscale conditions and climate perspective. *Weather and Forecasting*, 39(2), 275–291. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/WAF-D-23-0154.1>"]
- Matthes, K., ~~et al.~~ (2017). Solar forcing for CMIP6 (v3.2). *Geoscientific Model Development*, 10(6), 2247–2302. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.5194/gmd-10-2247-2017>"]
- McKinnon, K. and I. Simpson (2022) How Unexpected Was the 2021 Pacific Northwest Heatwave? *Geophysical Research Letters*, 49, e2022GL100380. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2022GL100380>"]
- McKinnon, K. and I. Simpson (2022) How Unexpected Was the 2021 Pacific Northwest Heatwave? *Geophysical Research Letters*, 49, e2022GL100380. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2022GL100380>"]
- McKittrick, R. (2021). Checking for model consistency in optimal fingerprinting: A comment. *Climate Dynamics*, 58(1–2), 405–411. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-021-05913-7>"]
- McKittrick, R. (2023). Total least squares bias in climate fingerprinting regressions with heterogeneous noise variances and correlated explanatory variables. *Environmetrics*, 35(2), e2835. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1002/env.2835>"]
- McKittrick, Ross R (2022) [HYPERLINK "<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00382-022-06315-z>" \t "_blank"]. *Climate Dynamics* 10.1007/s00382-022-06315-z
- McKittrick, Ross R (2025) Consistent Climate Fingerprinting. *Climate Dynamics* forthcoming preprint available at [HYPERLINK "<http://www.rossmckittrick.com>"]
- McLean, J.D., C. R. de Freitas, and R. M. Carter, (2009) “Influence of the Southern Oscillation on Tropospheric Temperature,” *Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres* 114, no. D14 (July 23, 2009): D14104, <https://doi.org/10.1029/2008JD011637>.
- Miralles, O., & Davison, A. (2023). Timing and spatial selection bias in rapid extreme event attribution. *Weather and Climate Extremes*, 41, 100...
- Miralles, Ophélie and Anthony Davison (2023) Timing and spatial selection bias in rapid extreme event attribution. *Weather and Climate Extremes* 41 100584 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wace.2023.100584>"]
- Myhre, G., D. Shindell, F.-M. Bréon, et al (2013): Anthropogenic and Natural Radiative Forcing. In: *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Stocker, T.F., ~~et al.~~ (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA.
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (NASEM, Forthcoming). Attribution of extreme weather and climate events and their impacts. The National Academies Press. [

- HYPERLINK "<https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/attribution-of-extreme-weather-and-climate-events-and-their-impacts>"]
- Nissan, Hannah, Lisa Goddard, Erin Coughlan de Perez, ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2019) On the use and misuse of climate change projections in international development. *Wires Climate Change* 14 March 2019 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.579>"]
- Palmer, Tim N and Bjorn Stevens (2019) The scientific challenge of understanding and estimating climate change. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116 (49) 24390-24395 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1906691116>"]
- Pearl, J. (2009). Causality. Cambridge University Press.
- Philip, S. Y., ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2022). Rapid attribution analysis of the extraordinary heatwave on the Pacific coast of the US and Canada June 2021. *Earth System Dynamics*, 13(4), 1689–1713. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.5194/esd-13-1689-2022>"]
- Pielke Jr., Roger (2024) Weather Attribution Alchemy. Substack essay [HYPERLINK "<https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/weather-attribution-alchemy>"]
- Ranasinghe, R., Ruane, A. C., Vautard, R., Arnell, N., Coppola, E., Cruz, F. A., ... Zaaboul, R. (2021). Chapter 12: Climate change information for regional impact and for risk assessment. In V. Masson-Delmotte ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (Eds.), *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (pp. 1767–1926). Cambridge University Press. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157896.014>"]
- Razzak, Weshah A. (2022). "The Econometrics of Global Warming," *Journal of Economics and Econometrics*, vol. 65(2), pages 13-47.
- Sardeshmukh, P. D., Compo, G. P., & Penland, C. (2015). Need for caution in interpreting extreme weather statistics. *Journal of Climate*, 28(23), 9166–9187. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/JCLI-D-15-0020.1>"]
- Scafetta, N. (2013). Discussion on climate oscillations: CMIP5 general circulation models versus a semi-empirical harmonic model based on astronomical cycles. *Earth-Science Reviews*, 126, 321
- Scaffeta, Nicola (2021) "Reconstruction of the Interannual to Millennial Scale Patterns of the Global Surface Temperature," *Atmosphere* 12, no. 2: 147, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3390/atmos12020147>"]
- Schmidt, G. (2024) Climate models can't explain 2023's huge heat anomaly — we could be in uncharted territory. *Nature* 627, 467. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-00816-z>"]
- Schmutz, Werner K. (2021) "Changes in the Total Solar Irradiance and Climatic Effects," *Journal of Space Weather and Space Climate* 11: 40, <https://doi.org/10.1051/swsc/2021016>.
- Seneviratne, S. ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2021) "Chapter 11: Weather and Climate Extreme Events in a Changing Climate." In *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, edited by V. Masson-Delmotte, P. Zhai, A. Pirani, S.L. Connors, C. Péan, S. Berger, N. Caud, ~~et al.~~ *et al.*, 1513–1766. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157896.013>.
- Solanki, S.K. ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2004), "Unusual Activity of the Sun during Recent Decades Compared to the Previous 11,000 Years," *Nature* 431, no. 7012 (October 28, 2004): 1084–1087, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/nature02995>"].

- Stefani, Frank (2021) “Solar and Anthropogenic Influences on Climate: Regression Analysis and Tentative Predictions,” *Climate* 9, no. 11 (November 3, 2021): 163, [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.3390/cli9110163"].
- Thompson, DJW, JM Wallace, JJ Kennedy, PD Jones (2010) An abrupt drop in Northern Hemisphere Sea Surface Temperature around 1970. *Nature*, 467, 444-447
- Tokinaga, H, SP Xie, and H Mukougawa (2017) Early 20th century Arctic warming intensified by Pacific and Atlantic multidecadal variability. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114, 6227-6233 [HYPERLINK "https://www.pnas.org/doi/abs/10.1073/pnas.1615880114"]
- Tung, Ka-Kit and Jiansong Zhou (2013) “Using Data to Attribute Episodes of Warming and Cooling in Instrumental Records,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110, no. 6 (January 23, 2013): 2058–2063, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1212471110>.
- Usoskin, I.G., S. K. Solanki, and G. A. Kovaltsov (2007) “Grand Minima and Maxima of Solar Activity: New Observational Constraints,” *Astronomy & Astrophysics* 471, no. 1 (June 6, 2007): 301–309, [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1051/0004-6361:20077704"].
- Velasco Herrera, V.M., B. Mendoza, and G. Velasco Herrera (2015) “Reconstruction and Prediction of the Total Solar Irradiance: From the Medieval Warm Period to the 21st Century,” *New Astronomy* 34 (January 2015): 221–233, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newast.2014.07.009>.
- Visser, H. and A.C. Petersen (2012) Inferences on weather extremes and weather-related disasters: a review of statistical methods *Climates of the Past* 8, 265–286 [HYPERLINK "https://cp.copernicus.org/articles/8/265/2012/cp-8-265-2012.pdf"]
- World Weather Attribution (2021) “Western North American Extreme Heat Virtually Impossible without Human-Caused Climate Change.” July 7, 2021. <https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/western-north-american-extreme-heat-virtually-impossible-without-human-caused-climate-change/>.
- Yuan, et al. (2024) Abrupt reduction in shipping emission as an inadvertent geoengineering termination shock produces substantial radiative warming. *Communications Earth and Environment* 5, 281 (2024). doi:10.1038/s43247-024-01442-3
- Zeder, J., Sippel, S., Pasche, O. C., Engelke, S., & Fischer, E. M. (2023). The effect of a short observational record on the statistics of temperature extremes. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 50, e2023GL104090. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1029/2023GL104090"]

OUO – Official Use Only – OUO – Confidential Draft – Pre-Review – Do Not Distribute

PART III: IMPACTS ON ECOSYSTEMS AND SOCIETY

9 CLIMATE CHANGE AND US AGRICULTURE

Chapter summary

There has been abundant evidence going back decades that rising CO₂ levels benefit plants, including agricultural crops, and that CO₂-induced warming will be a net benefit to US agriculture. The warming since 1981, in combination with adaptive behavior by farmers, has been beneficial for maize. The increased ambient CO₂ has also boosted productivity of all major US crop types. Various attempts to argue that CO₂-induced warming will harm agriculture do not hold up under scrutiny.

9.1 Econometric analyses

Econometric analyses of the effects of climate change on agriculture have sought to integrate information about long term crop yield changes in response to temperature and precipitation changes under assumptions about adaptive behavior by farmers. One method focuses on variations in agricultural land values. The rationale is that if climate change is a long-term net benefit for agriculture it should be capitalized into higher market values for agricultural land, and vice versa. While individual crops might benefit from or be harmed by climate change, once the adaptive responses of farmers are considered the value of farmland represents an index of whether the changes are expected to be beneficial or not. Mendelsohn ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (1994) examined the relationship between historical climatic variations on agricultural land values and concluded global warming would be slightly beneficial to American agriculture.

The Mendelsohn ~~et al.~~ *et al.* method, called Ricardian analysis after David Ricardo, the 19th century British economist who pioneered the study of land values, attracted subsequent criticism from authors who argued it failed to account for differences in land values attributable to fixed locational characteristics like soil quality, and non-climatic changes including nearby urbanization. Deschênes and Greenstone (2007) looked at agricultural profits instead of land values and reached conclusions similar to Mendelsohn ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (1994), namely that past climatic variations had relatively little effect on farm profitability and that warming would likely yield small overall benefits for the US agricultural sector. However, a subsequent exchange with critics led them (Deschênes and Greenstone 2012) to revise their conclusions and project potentially large losses in US agriculture due to climate warming.

Burke and Emerick (2016) looked at temperature variations over 1980 to 2000 and argued that farmers were not as able to adapt to temperature changes as the Ricardian method assumes and that climate change would have large negative impacts on corn and soy yields. Schlenker and Roberts (2009) similarly argued that yield gains to past warming would not carry over to the future and corn and soy yields would sharply decrease this century due to climate change.

Two recent studies have argued that pessimistic findings such as these are not robust. Ortiz-Bobea (2019) argued that land values aggregate farm and non-farm influences and the latter need to be filtered out. He developed a data set using cash rents for agricultural activity as a measure of land value specifically for farming activity. Whereas the land value model implied future losses under climate warming, the same model estimated using cash rents did not, leading the author to conclude the pessimistic results were due to using an inaccurate measure of the returns to farming activity. Bareille and Chakir (2023) assembled a large data base on farm sale prices in France for properties that sold twice between 1996 and 2019. They could replicate pessimistic results showing negative effects of warming on agricultural land values using conventional econometric modeling. But by taking advantage of the repeat sales data, which provides information on site-specific changes in land prices, they found the results reversed and implied that climate change will be very beneficial for French agriculture. The authors concluded that, taking adaptation into

account, a warming climate would yield positive benefits for French agriculture that were between two and 20 times larger than had previously been estimated. On average, with full adaptation, they concluded that climate changes under the medium RCP4.5 scenario could double the value of French farmland by 2100.

A major deficiency of all these studies, however, is that they omit the role of CO₂ fertilization. Climate change as it relates to this report is caused by GHG emissions, chiefly CO₂. The econometric analyses referenced above focus only on temperature and precipitation changes and do not take account of the beneficial growth effect of the additional CO₂ that drives them. As explained in Chapter 2, CO₂ is a major driver of plant growth, so this omission biases the analysis towards underestimation of the benefits of climate change to agriculture.

9.2 Field studies of CO₂ enrichment

One of the ways the effect of CO₂ on crop growth has been studied is through “free air enrichment experiments” or FACE plots, in which small sources of CO₂ are placed in fields surrounding plants and the growth response to elevated CO₂ under varying weather conditions are recorded. Ainsworth *et al.* (2020) summarizes results from about 250 such studies. They found that elevation of CO₂ by 200 ppm caused an average 18% increase in crop yield in C3 plants. C4 plants exhibited benefits mainly under drought conditions.

In addition to FACE plot experiments there have been thousands of laboratory experiments on the effects of CO₂ on all kinds of plant growth. Here we review some of the results on key US agricultural crops.

Soybean

Studies on the impact of elevated CO₂ on Soybean (*Glycine max* (L.) Merr.) plants in the water-deficient region of Huang-Huai-Hai Plain, China, showed that elevated CO₂ concentrations improved photosynthesis rate, water use efficiency, and growth Li (2013) under both normal conditions and drought conditions. The CO2Science.org website reports on 108 published experiments between 1985 and 2019 exposing soybean to enriched CO₂ levels. Converted to a +300ppm common scale the average growth benefit was +50.9 percent. There were also ten studies reporting on +600 ppm CO₂ enrichment, which increased photosynthesis by an average of 90.3%.

Maize (corn)

The CO2Science.org website reports on 28 published experiments between 1983 and 2018 exposing corn (*Zea mays* L.) to enriched CO₂ levels. Converted to a +300ppm common scale the average growth benefit was +23.7 percent. Corn also benefits from increased drought tolerance under elevated CO₂. An experimental study (Allen Jr., 2011) exposed plants to water stress conditions in sunlit controlled-environment chambers at 360 ppm (ambient) and 720 ppm (elevated) CO₂. The drought stress caused a 41% loss of growth under ambient CO₂ but only a 13% loss under elevated CO₂.

Wheat

The CO2Science.org website reports on 92 published experiments between 1983 and 2020 exposing common wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) to enriched CO₂ levels. Converted to a +300ppm common scale the average growth benefit was +67.6 percent. Blandino (2020) measured both the yield and nutritional quality of an “improver” hybrid wheat variety and its parents under elevated CO₂ levels (+166 ppm). They reported a grain yield increase of +16% but a 7% decrease in grain protein levels. But they found that the food quality of different wheat varieties responded differently to elevated CO₂ levels, so that with proper varietal selection, growers could select wheat types that best take advantage of the elevated CO₂.

Further evidence

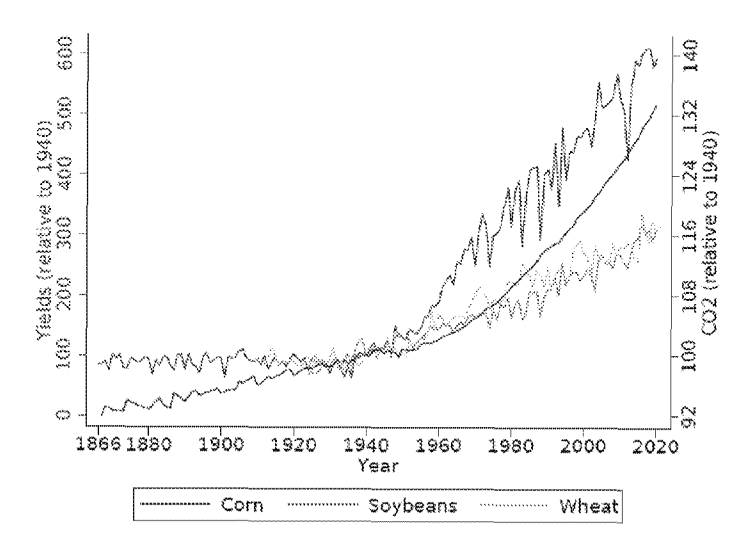


Figure 9.1: US average CO₂ levels and yields of corn, soy and wheat all normalized so 1940=100. Source: Taylor and Schlenker (2021)

A 2021 report from the US National Bureau of Economic Research (Taylor and Schlenker 2021) used satellite-measured observations of outdoor CO₂ levels across the United States, matched to county-level agricultural output data and other economic variables. After controlling for the effects of weather, pollution and technology the authors concluded that CO₂ emissions had boosted U.S. crop production since 1940 by 50 to 80 percent, attributing much larger gains than had previously been estimated using FACE experiments. They found that every ppm of increase in CO₂ concentration boosts corn yields by 0.5 percent, soybeans by 0.6 percent, and wheat by 0.8 percent.

Beyond growth benefits, extra CO₂ boosts plant resilience to dryness. Deryng *et al.* (2016) surveyed evidence on crop water productivity (CWP, the yield per unit of water used), drawing attention to the potential for CO₂ both to enhance photosynthesis and reduce leaf-level transpiration (water loss during leaf respiration). They surveyed all available FACE data on crop yield changes for Maize (corn), Wheat, Rice and Soybean, and combined it with crop model data simulating yield responses as of 2080 under the extreme RCP8.5 scenario in four growing regions (Tropics, Arid, Temperate and Cold) each of which were split into rainfed and irrigated sub-regions. In every region they reported that models without CO₂ fertilization predicted CWP losses but CO₂ fertilization more than offset them; once fertilization was taken into account, all regions showed a net CWP gain. Deryng *et al.* also reported that negative yield impacts on wheat and soybean were fully offset by CWP gains, and mitigated by up to 90% for rice and 60% for maize.

Similar to this, Cheng *et al.* (2017) noted that increased global plant growth from 1982 to 2011 due to rising CO₂ uptake was accompanied by such large gains in CWP that despite the extra biomass global water use by plants had not increased.

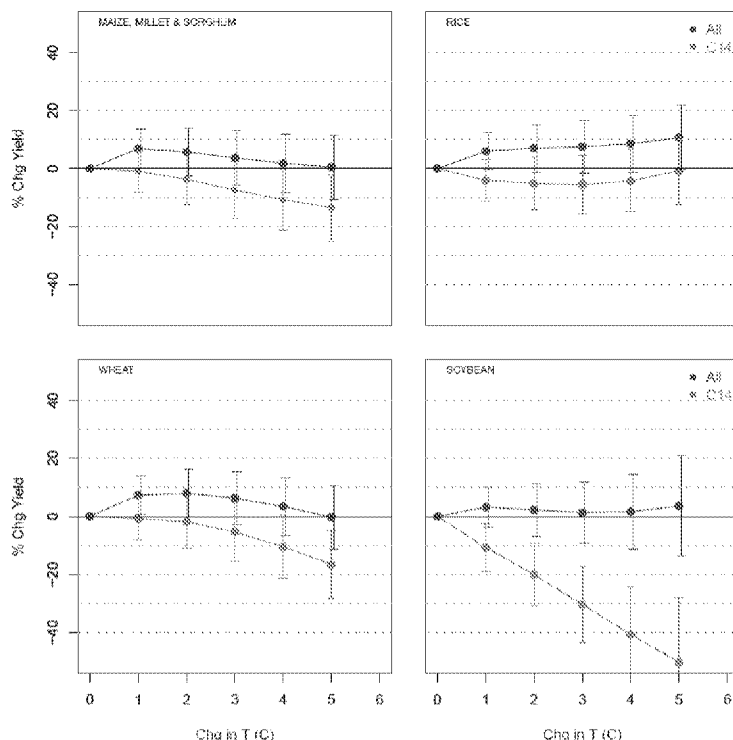


Figure 9.2 Crop yields under CO₂-induced climate warming. Blue: as published in Moore *et al.* (2017). Green: after including omitted data. Source: McKittrick (2025).

Deryng *et al.* (2016) assumed that climate change would “exacerbate water scarcity”. It is noteworthy that while models predict drylands will expand under climate warming, observations show the opposite: greening is happening even in arid areas. Zhang *et al.* (2024) report that due to increased CO₂ levels “increasing aridity in drylands won’t lead to a general loss of vegetation productivity”; increased desertification will happen in at most 4% of currently arid areas.

9.3 Crop modeling meta-analyses

Notwithstanding the abundant evidence for the direct benefits of CO₂ and of CO₂-induced warming on crop growth, in 2023 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA 2023) boosted its estimate of the Social Cost of Carbon (SCC) about five-fold based in large part on a very pessimistic 2017 estimate of global agricultural damages from climate warming (Moore *et al.*, 2017). One of the two damage models used by the EPA attributed nearly half of the 2030 SCC to projected global agricultural damages based on the Moore *et al.* (2017) analysis. This study was a meta-analysis of crop model studies simulating yield changes for agricultural crops under various climate warming scenarios. Moore *et al.* projected declining global crop yields for all crop types in all regions due to warming.

McKittrick (2025) re-examined the Moore *et al.* database and found that, while it claimed to cover 1,722 studies, only half the entries ($N=862$) had complete records, so that the sample available for regression analysis was much smaller than both studies indicated. McKittrick noted that the variable most commonly missing was the change in ambient CO₂ and found that in many cases these could be recovered from the underlying studies or the original climate scenario tables. He thereby increased the usable sample size by 40 percent. The crop yield projections incorporating the newly available data changed considerably. As shown in Figure 10.2, whereas the partial data set implied warming would decrease yield (blue lines), the complete data set implied constant or increase global yields, even out to 5°C warming (green lines).

In summary, there is abundant evidence going back decades that rising CO₂ levels benefit plants including agricultural crops, and that CO₂-induced warming will be a net benefit to US agriculture.

References

- Ainsworth, Elizabeth and Stephen P. Long (2020) 30 years of free-air carbon dioxide enrichment (FACE): What have we learned about future crop productivity and its potential for adaptation? *Global Change Biology* [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.15375>"]
- Allen Jr, L. K. (2011). Elevated CO₂ increases water use efficiency by sustaining photosynthesis of water-limited maize and sorghum. *Journal of Plant physiology*, 168(16), 1909-1918.
- Bareille, F. and R. Chakir (2023) The impact of climate change on agriculture: A repeat-Ricardian analysis. *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management* 119
- Blandino, M. B. (2020). Elevated CO₂ impact on common wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) yield, wholemeal quality, and sanitary risk. *Journal of agricultural and food chemistry*, 68(39), 10574-10585.
- Burke, Marshall and Kyle Emerick (2016) Adaptation to Climate Change: Evidence from US Agriculture. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 8(3) August 2016 106–140 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/pol.20130025>"]
- Cheng, L., Zhang, L., Wang, YP. *et al.* Recent increases in terrestrial carbon uptake at little cost to the water cycle. *Nature Communications* 8, 110 (2017). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-017-00114-5>"]
- CO2Science.org (undated) Plant growth archive
http://www.co2science.org/data/plant_growth/dry/dry_subject_b.php
- Deryng, D., Elliott, J., Folberth, C. *et al.* (2021) Regional disparities in the beneficial effects of rising CO₂ concentrations on crop water productivity. *Nature Climate Change* 6, 786–790 (2016). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2995>"]
- Deschênes, Olivier and Michael Greenstone (2012) The Economic Impacts of Climate Change: Evidence from Agricultural Output and Random Fluctuations in Weather: Reply to Comment *American Economic Review*. 102, no. 7: 3761-3773. [HYPERLINK "<http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/82641>"]
- Li, D. L. (2013). Effects of elevated CO₂ on the growth, seed yield, and water use efficiency of soybean (*Glycine max* (L.) Merr.) under drought stress. *Agricultural Water Management*, 129, 105-112.
- McKittrick, Ross R. (2025) Extended Crop Yield Meta-analysis Data do not Support Upward SCC Revision. *Scientific Reports* 15 article 5575 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-025-90254-2>"]
- Mendelsohn, R., Nordhaus, W. D., & Shaw, D. (1994). The impact of global warming on agriculture: a Ricardian analysis. *The American Economic Review*, Sept 1994 753-771.
- Moore FC, Baldos U, Hertel T, Diaz D (2017) News of climate change impacts on agriculture implies higher social cost of carbon. *Nature Communications* 8:1607. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-017-01792-x>
- Ortiz-Bobea, Ariel (2019) The role of nonfarm influences in ricardian estimates of climate change impacts on US agriculture. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*. 102 (3), 934–959.

- Schlenker, Wolfram and Michael Roberts (2009) Nonlinear temperature effects indicate severe damages to U.S. crop yields under climate change. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106 (37) 15594-15598 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0906865106>"]
- Taylor, Charles and Wolfram Schlenker (2023) Environmental drivers of agricultural productivity growth: CO2 fertilization of US field crops. National Bureau of Economic Research Working paper 29320, [HYPERLINK "<http://www.nber.org/paper/w29320>"]
- US Environmental Protection Agency (2023) Supplementary Material for the Regulatory Impact Analysis for the Final Rulemaking, “Standards of Performance for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources and Emissions Guidelines for Existing Sources: Oil and Natural Gas Sector Climate Review”, EPA Report on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases: Estimates Incorporating Recent Scientific Advances, November 2023, [HYPERLINK "https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-12/epa_scghg_2023_report_final.pdf"]
- Zhang ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2024) Less than 4% of dryland areas are projected to desertify despite increased aridity under climate change. *Nature Communications Earth and Environment* 5 June 2024 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01463-y>"]

10 MANAGING RISKS OF EXTREME WEATHER

Chapter summary

Trends in losses from extreme weather and climate events are dominated by population increases and economic growth. Technological advances such as improved weather forecasting and early warning systems have substantially reduced losses from extreme weather events. Better building codes, flood defenses, and disaster response mechanisms have lowered economic losses relative to GDP. The US economy's expansion has diluted the relative impact of disaster costs, as seen in the comparison of historical and modern GDP percentages. Heat-related mortality risk has dropped substantially due to adaptive measures including the adoption of air conditioning, which relies on the availability of affordable energy. U.S. mortality risks even under extreme warming scenarios are not projected to increase as long as people are able to undertake adaptive responses.

10.1 Socioeconomic context

Risks from human-caused climate change are affected by natural weather and climate variability, and variability and are dominated by the exposure of wealth in coastal and other disaster-prone regions and vulnerabilities of poorer populations. The evolution of climate risk in the U.S. has been dominated by societal factors, rather than by changes to the actual weather and climate hazards. Deaths from weather disasters have decreased substantially since 1900, even as U.S. population grew from 76 million in 1900 to over 331 million in 2020 (Coklany 2011). For example, the Galveston hurricane killed over 8,000 people in 1900 (0.01% of the US population), whereas the worst recent disaster, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, killed 1800 people (or 0.0006% of the US population) (NOAA National Hurricane Center 2025; US Census Bureau 2025).

Technological advances have substantially reduced losses from extreme weather events. Early warning systems, satellite monitoring, and improved weather forecasting have reduced deaths, although exact numbers are hard to quantify (Deryugina and Hsiang 2023). U.S. weather forecasting has been estimated to reduce losses from weather events with an annualized benefit of \$31.5B, protecting lives, property, and supporting agriculture and transportation (NRC 2010). Improved hurricane forecasts have reduced pre- and post-landfall spending, with annual per hurricane cost reductions estimated at \$5B (NBER 2024).

Infrastructure improvements have contributed to substantial reductions in losses from extreme weather events. Building codes, such as those implemented in Florida after Hurricane Andrew (1992), have reduced losses by ensuring structures can withstand high winds and floods. Homes built after 2002 showed minimal damage during Hurricane Michael (2018), unlike older homes (FEMA 2020). Sea walls, like the Galveston Seawall, protect against wave action and storm surge. The New Orleans Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk Reduction System successfully mitigated storm surge during Hurricane Isaac (2012) (Battelle Memorial Institute 2013). Inland dams in the US help control flooding by storing excess water during heavy rains. It is estimated that the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) dams prevent about \$309M in annual flood damage in the TVA region and along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers (TVA, 2025). During Hurricane Helene (2024), TVA's strategies prevented approximately \$406M in potential damages (APPA 2024).

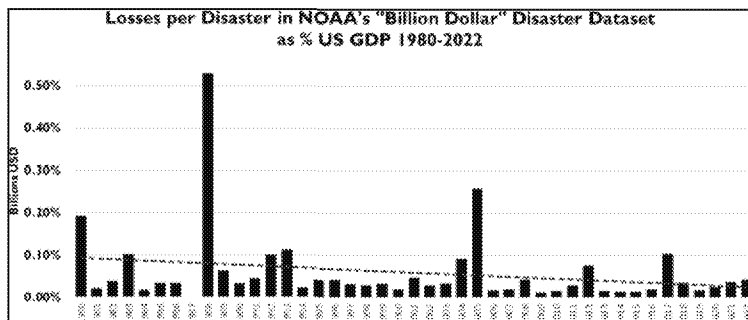


Figure 10.1: Losses per disaster in NOAA's billion dollar disaster dataset (the version downloaded in July 2023), 1980 to 2022. Source: (Pielke, Jr. 2024)

10.2 Data challenges

Since 1980, NOAA has provided a count of annual U.S. weather-related disasters that it estimates to have exceeded \$1 Billion (inflation adjusted), showing a substantial increase starting in 2008. NOAA and other government officials have cited the upward trend in the Billion Dollar Disaster series as evidence that climate change is making extreme weather worse (Pielke Jr., 2024). But over time, population and wealth have increased dramatically in the U.S., so when an extreme weather or climate event occurs, there is more damage even if there is no underlying trend in the frequency or intensity of extreme weather. Pielke Jr. (2024) demonstrates that losses per weather disaster as a proportion of GDP have decreased by about 80% since 1980, as shown in Figure 10.1. Pielke Jr. (2024) also argued that in addition to relying on opaque data sources and unreported adjustments, NOAA failed to normalize its Billion Dollar Disaster data series properly for changes in population exposure and wealth. In May 2025 NOAA announced it has withdrawn the Billion Dollar Disaster product from publication (Pielke Jr., 2025).

In summary, trends in losses from extreme weather and climate events are dominated by population increases and economic growth. Technological advances such as improved weather forecasting and early warning systems have substantially reduced losses from extreme weather events. Better building codes, flood defenses, and disaster response mechanisms have lowered economic losses relative to GDP. And finally, the U.S. economy's expansion has diluted the relative impact of disaster costs, as seen in the comparison of historical and modern GDP percentages.

10.3 Mortality from temperature extremes

10.3.1 Heat and cold risks

Changes in temperature extremes are among the most certain impacts expected in a warming world. It stands to reason that extreme heat events would likely become more frequent while extreme cold events would become less frequent. This pattern is evident in the historical period though not in the continental US (Chapter 6) and is expected to continue with further warming.

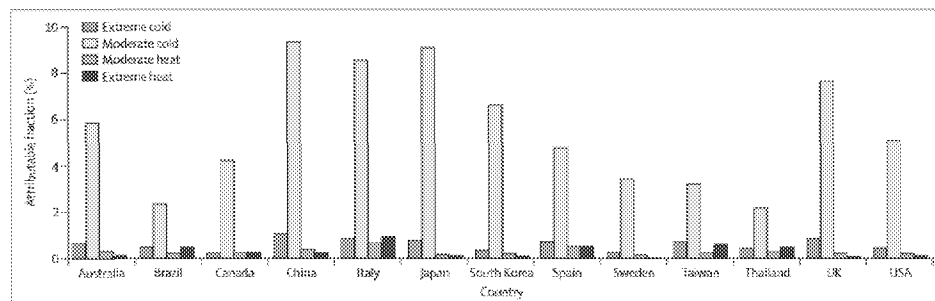


Figure 10.2. Mortality attributable to extreme and moderate cold and heat by country. Source: reproduced from Gasparini *et al.* (2015).

Mortality during heat extremes is typically caused by heat stroke and heat exhaustion, while mortality during cold extremes is typically caused by hypothermia and heart strain. Global mortality is substantially greater for cold conditions than for hot conditions (Zhao et al 2021, Ritchie 2024). Unlike with heat-related mortality, cold-weather risks set in even at moderately cold conditions (Gasparini *et al.* 2015, Lee and Dessler 2023). The US EPA (citing data from the Centers for Disease Control) reports that on average over 1999 to 2015 there were 2.2 deaths per million Americans for which cold was listed as the main underlying cause and an additional 2.4 deaths per million for which cold was listed as a contributing factor (EPA 2025). By contrast there were 1.3 deaths per million for which heat was the main cause and an additional 0.8 per million for which it was a contributor. By this metric cold accounts for approximately double the weather-related deaths as does heat. ~~after adjusting for seasonality, the cold-related death rate in the U.S. is about twice as large as the heat-related rate (see [HYPERLINK "https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-cold-related-deaths"] and [HYPERLINK "https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-heat-related-deaths"]~~

Epidemiological methods, which consider correlational evidence not just death certificate reports, indicate the cold/warm ratio may be much higher. A 13-country study of 74 million deaths from 1985 to 2012 estimated that, on average, 7.7% of deaths were attributable to sub-optimal temperatures, of which 7.4% were attributable to cold and only 0.4% were attributable to heat (Gasparini *et al.* 2015). In other words cold weather killed 18.5 times as many people as did hot weather.

Figure 10.2 shows the distribution of results from Gasparini *et al.* (2015) by country. For the United States the fraction of deaths attributable to temperature was 5.9%, of which 5.5% was due to cold, thus cold weather killed 14 times as many people as hot weather.

~~The US EPA report that, after adjusting for seasonality, the cold-related death rate in the U.S. is about twice as large as the heat-related rate (see [HYPERLINK "https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-cold-related-deaths"] and [HYPERLINK "https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-heat-related-deaths"]~~

There is strong evidence that people adapt to weather risks. Lee and Dessler (2023) reported that 86% of temperature-related deaths across 40 cities in the U.S. were due to cold-related mortality, and that due to adaptation the relative risk of death declined in hot and cold cities alike as seasonal temperatures increased. Allen and Sheridan (2018) found that short, early-season cold events were 2 to 5 times deadlier than hot events, but the mortality risk of both cold and hot extremes drops to nearly zero if the events occur late in the season.

Davis ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2003) examined heat-related mortality in 28 U.S. cities from the 1960s to the end of the 1990s and found that heat-related mortality declined by three-quarters over the sample period. Bobb ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2014) examined mortality data for 106 million people in over 100 cities U.S. cities and found a 60% decline in average heat-related mortality over the period 1987–2005, from 51 per thousand deaths to 19. They furthermore found that the greatest drop was among seniors over the age of 75. In a study of 42 million deaths in 211 U.S. cities from 1962 to 2006, Nordio ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2015) found a more than 90 percent decline in the risk of mortality from excess heat.

In the context of large declines in heat-related mortality, by reducing mortality from cold events rising temperatures are associated with a net saving of lives.

The IPCC AR6 Working Group 2 Chapter 16.2.3.5 (O'Neill ~~et al.~~ *et al.*, 2022) acknowledges that heat-related mortality risk is declining over time:

Heat-attributable mortality fractions have declined over time in most countries owing to general improvements in health care systems, increasing prevalence of residential air conditioning, and behavioral changes. These factors, which determine the susceptibility of the population to heat, have predominated over the influence of temperature change.

It is both disappointing and telling to see how the IPCC misrepresents the situation in its The IPCC AR6 Synthesis report, (Section A.2.5) of that document states: “In all regions increases in extreme heat events have resulted in human mortality and morbidity (*very high confidence*).” But it is silent on the larger decline of deaths during extreme cold events.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0"

The observed decline in US heat-related mortality has been specifically attributed to adaptation. Wang ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2018) exploited the spatial variability of heatwave-related mortality across 209 U.S. cities from 1962 to 2006. While simple correlation appeared to imply an increase in mortality risk during heatwaves, accounting for adaptation to heatwave intensity caused the effect to fall to near zero and become statistically insignificant. They used the results of their epidemiological model to project heat-related mortality out to 2050 under four RCP warming scenarios (including RCP8.5) with and without adaptive behavior. Assuming people continue to adapt to the heatwave risks in the regions in which they live Wang ~~et al.~~ *et al.* project not only no increase in heat-related mortality but an overall decrease for the U.S. as a whole. They conclude that

Ignoring adaptation would result in a substantial overestimate of future mortality related to heat waves... Accounting for adaptation, the overall heat-related mortality by 2050 would not change substantially over time compared to 2006.

10.3.2 Mortality risks and energy costs

A 2016 study of US long term mortality risks associated with temperature variations (Barreca *et al.* 2016) showed that increases in mortality across the US are associated with both cold weather and hot weather. But over time, the introduction of electricity and the adoption of central heating and air conditioning (AC) dramatically reduced both risks, especially those associated with hot weather. Prior to 1960, a day above 90°F (32°C) added 2.2 percent to the average mortality risk rate, but after 1960 the same weather added only 0.3 percent to mortality risk, an 85 percent reduction. Prior to 1960 temperatures below 39°F (4°C) added about 1 percent to mortality risk but after 1960 the same weather only added about half that amount. Adaptation through conventional household improvements dramatically reduced public vulnerability to weather extremes. The entire reduction in hot weather mortality was attributable to widespread adoption of indoor AC, which depended on the availability of reliable and affordable electricity.

The corollary of this finding is that the use of heating and cooling systems depends on energy being affordable. Doremus *et al.* (2022) showed that wealthy and poor households in the US adjust their energy expenditures at similar rates in response to moderate temperature swings, but not in response to extreme temperature swings. When temperatures swing to very cold levels (<5°C) energy spending in high-income households rises by 1.2 percent but in low-income households by only 0.5 percent. On very hot days (>30°C) electricity spending in high-income households rises by 0.5 percent but does not change at all in low-income households. The latter result is observed even in subsamples where all households have AC. The implication is that even with widespread adoption of home heating and cooling systems, inability to afford energy leaves low-income households exposed to weather extremes.

References

- Allen, M.J. and S.C. Sheridan (2018) Mortality risks during extreme temperature events (ETEs) using a distributed lag non-linear model. (2018) *International Journal of Biometeorology* 62, 57–67 (2018). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00484-015-1117-4>"]
- American Public Power Association. (APPA, 2024, March 7). TVA flood mitigation strategies prevented approximately \$406 million in potential damages. Public Power Current. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.publicpower.org/periodical/article/tva-flood-mitigation-strategies-prevented-approximately-406-million-potential-damages>" \t "_new"]
- Barreca, Alan, Karen Clay, Olivier Deschenes, Michael Greenstone, and Joseph S. Shapiro, “Adapting to climate change: The remarkable decline in the US temperature mortality relationship over the twentieth century,” *Journal of Political Economy*, 2016, 124 (1), 105–159.
- Battelle Memorial Institute. (2013, December). Final independent external peer review report: Hurricane Isaac (2012) assessment (Prepared for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District). [HYPERLINK "<https://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/Portals/56/docs/PD/PeerReview/TCN13-003HurIsaacAssessIEPRFinal.pdf>" \t "_new"]
- Bobb JF, RD Peng, ML Bell and F Dominici (2014) Heat-related mortality and adaptation to heat in the United States. *Environmental Health Perspectives* 122:811–816; [HYPERLINK "<https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/full/10.1289/ehp.1307392>"]
- Davis, Robert E., Paul C. Knappenberger, Patrick J. Michaels and Wendy M. Novicoff (2003) “Changing Heat-Related Mortality in the United States” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 111(14) November 2003 pp. 1712–1718 [HYPERLINK "<https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/pdf/10.1289/ehp.6336>"]
- Deryugina, T., & Hsiang, S. M. (2023). Does the environment still matter? Daily temperature and income in the United States (NBER Working Paper No. 31361). National Bureau of Economic Research. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nber.org/papers/w31361>" \t "_new"]

- Doremus, JM, I. Jacqz and S. Johnston (2022), “Sweating the energy bill: Extreme weather, poor households, and the energy spending gap.” *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, doi: [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeem.2022.102609"] .
- Environmental Protection Agency (2025) Climate Change Indicators. [HYPERLINK "https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/view-indicators"]
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). (2020, February 13). The role of Florida’s building codes in Hurricane Michael recovery. [HYPERLINK "https://www.fema.gov/case-study/role-floridas-building-codes-2018-hurricane-michael" \t "_new"]
- Goklany, I. M. (2011). Deaths from extreme weather events, 1900–2010. Reason Foundation. [HYPERLINK "https://a8d50b36.delivery.rocketcdn.me/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/deaths_from_extreme_weather_1900_2010.pdf" \t "_new"]
- National Bureau of Economic Research. (NBER, 2024, September). The value of improving hurricane forecasts. NBER Digest. [HYPERLINK "https://www.nber.org/digest/202409/value-improving-hurricane-forecasts" \t "_new"]
- National Hurricane Center. (n.d.). Costliest U.S. tropical cyclones tables updated. NOAA National Hurricane Center. Retrieved May 8, 2025, from [HYPERLINK "https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/outreach/history/" \t "_new"]
- National Research Council. (2010). Adapting to the impacts of climate change. The National Academies Press. [HYPERLINK "https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/12888/chapter/2" \t "_new"]
- Nordio, Francesco, Antonella Zanobetti, Elena Colicino, Itai Kloog and Joel Schwartz (2015). “Changing patterns of the temperature–mortality association by time and location in the US, and implications for climate change” *Environment International* Volume 81, pp 80-86 [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2015.04.009"] .
- O'Neill, B., et al. (2022). Key risks across sectors and regions. In AR6 Working Group II Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability (pp. 2411–2538). Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. [HYPERLINK "http://www.ipcc.ch"]
- Pielke Jr., R. (2024). Scientific integrity and U.S. 'billion dollar disasters'. *npj Natural Hazards*, 1, Article 12. [HYPERLINK "https://www.nature.com/articles/s44304-024-00011-0" \t "_new"]
- Pielke Jr., R. (2025, May 8). RIP NOAA’s billion dollar disasters. The Honest Broker [Substack]. [HYPERLINK "https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/rip-noaas-billion-dollar-disasters" \t "_new"]
- Ritchie, H. (2024). How many people die from extreme temperatures, and how this could change in the future: Part one. Our World in Data. [HYPERLINK "https://ourworldindata.org/part-one-how-many-people-die-from-extreme-temperatures-and-how-could-this-change-in-the-future" \t "_new"]
- Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). (n.d.). Flood management. Retrieved May 8, 2025, from [HYPERLINK "https://www.tva.com/environment/managing-the-river/flood-management" \t "_new"]
- U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). Decennial census by decade. Retrieved May 8, 2025, from [HYPERLINK "https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade.html" \t "_new"]
- Wang, Yan, Francesco Nordio, John Nairn, Antonella Zanobetti and Joel D. Schwartz (2018) “Accounting for adaptation and intensity in projecting heat wave-related mortality” *Environmental Research* 161 pp. 464—471. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2017.11.049"]

Zhao, Q., et al. (2021). Global, regional, and national burden of mortality associated with non-optimal ambient temperatures from 2000 to 2019: A three-stage modelling study. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 5(7). [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1016/s2542-5196(21)00081-4"]

11 CLIMATE CHANGE, THE ECONOMY AND THE SOCIAL COST OF CARBON

Chapter summary

Economists have long considered climate a relatively unimportant factor in economic growth, a view echoed by the IPCC itself in the AR5. Mainstream climate economics has recognized that CO₂-induced warming may have some negative economic effects but they are too small to justify aggressive abatement policy, and policy and that trying to “stop” or cap global warming even at levels well above the Paris target would be worse than doing nothing. An influential study in 2012 suggested that global warming would harm growth in poor countries, but the finding has subsequently been found not to be robust. Studies that take full account of modeling uncertainties either find no evidence of a negative effect on global growth from CO₂ emissions or find poor countries as likely to benefit from it as rich countries.

Social Cost of Carbon (SCC) estimates are highly uncertain due to unknowns in future economic growth, socioeconomic pathways, discount rates, climate damages, and system responses. The SCC is not intrinsically informative as to the economic or societal impacts of climate change. It provides an index connecting large networks of assumptions about the climate and the economy to a dollar value. Some assumptions yield a high SCC and others yield a low or negative SCC (i.e. a social benefit of emissions). The evidence for or against the underlying assumptions needs to be established independently; the resulting SCC adds no additional information about the validity of those

assumptions. Consideration of potential tipping points at present does not justify major revisions to SCC estimates.

11.1 Climate change and economic growth

11.1.1 Overview: climate is a relatively minor issue for a modern economy

It has long been noted that economies tend to do poorly in very cold and very hot regions, with the optimum somewhere in between (Nordhaus, 2006). Temperature-sensitive economic activity migrates, whenever possible, to where it is best suited, and society always adapts to the local climate. Based in part on these observations, in 1992 Thomas Schelling, then President of the American Economic Association, argued that any effects of climate change on US economic activity would be small relative to the many other changes that would happen.

... Manufacturing rarely depends on climate, and where temperature and humidity used to make a difference, air conditioning has intervened. When Toyota chooses among Ohio, Alabama, and Southern California for locating an automobile assembly, geographical considerations are important, but not because of climate... Finance is little affected by climate; similarly for health care, or education, or broadcasting. Transportation can be affected, but improvements in all-weather landing and take-off in the last 30 years are greater than any differences that climate makes. If the average effect is a warming, iced waterways and snow removal may decline in importance. Construction is affected, mainly by cold, and if the average effect is in the direction of warming, construction may benefit slightly.

It is really agriculture that is affected. But even if agricultural productivity declined by a third over the next half century, the per capita GNP we might have achieved by 2050 we would achieve only in 2051. ...

I conclude that in the United States, and probably Japan, Western Europe, and other developed countries, the impact on economic output will be negligible and unlikely to be noticed.

Thirty years later virtually the identical point was made by the IPCC itself in the Fifth Assessment Report:

For most economic sectors, the impact of climate change will be small relative to the impacts of other drivers. Changes in population, age, income, technology, relative prices, lifestyle, regulation, governance, and many other aspects of socioeconomic development will have an impact on the supply and demand of economic goods and services that is large relative to the impact of climate change.

(Arent *et al.* 2014, emphasis added)

That statement is validated by experience. Since 1900, the average global surface temperature anomaly warmed 1.3°C, about as much as the IPCC predicts will occur in the next century under a moderate emissions scenario. But even as the globe warmed and the population quintupled, humanity prospered as never before. For example, global average lifespan went from thirty-two years to seventy-two years,

economic activity per capita grew by a factor of seven, and the death rate from extreme weather events plummeted by a factor of fifty!

While extreme weather events are costly, in all modern economies they are becoming steadily less and less important (Formetta and Feyen, 2019). Since 1990 weather-related disaster losses have declined as a proportion of global GDP (Pielke Jr , 2018, 2020) as have mortality risks (Formetta and Feyen, 2019). While economic weather-related insurance payouts are rising, this is fully explained by the growth in the size of the economy and the value of the insured asset stock. Past increases in episodes extreme weather have not had a significant effect (positive or negative) on the market value of insurance firms (Hu and McKittrick, 2015). Nor have past extreme weather events had a significant effect on US banks' performance (Blickle *et al.*, 2021). Figure 11.1 below is illustrative. For these reasons, economists have long been reluctant to endorse attempts to "stop" climate change or even aggressively reduce GHG emissions because the costs would not be worth it. As one critic of the economics of climate policy put it:

Mainstream climate economics takes global warming seriously, but perplexingly concludes that the optimal economic policy is to almost do nothing about it... The contrast is striking. While climate science is sending out loud-and-clear messages that fossil-fuel disinvestment must start now, letting go of coal and oil and diverting resources into renewable energy technology systems, to keep warming below the 2°C limit (IPCC 2014), mainstream climate economics claims that overly ambitious climate targets will unnecessarily hurt the economy and immediate de-carbonization is too expensive. Most climate economists thus recommend humanity to just wait-and-see.

(Storm 2017)

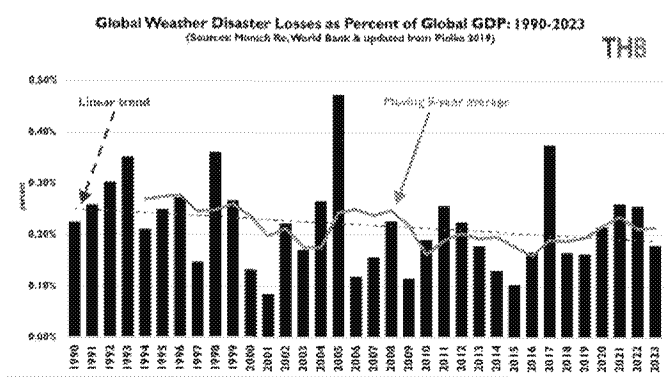


Figure 11.1 Global weather losses as a fraction of GDP. Source: Pielke Jr. (2023)

The mainstream economics position on the climate policy question is best represented by the findings over the past three decades from Integrated Assessment Models (IAMs) of climate change policy, for which Yale economist William Nordhaus was awarded the 2018 Nobel Memorial Prize in economics. IAMs

combine economic, climate, and social data into a unified framework for simulating climate damages and evaluating the optimal policy response (Resources for the Future, 2025). Nordhaus' work has generally supported modest global climate policy, with aggressive measures largely deferred to later in the century. Nordhaus developed the so-called Dynamic Integrated Model of the Climate and Economy model, or DICE, in the early 1990s (Nordhaus, 1993) to study the interaction between climate change, climate policy, and global economic growth over long times. DICE assumes global emission control can be coordinated at no cost and asks what the optimal policy target should be. The climate component of the DICE model is based on simplified climatological modeling. The version of DICE at the time of Nordhaus' Nobel Prize award was described in Nordhaus (2018); it had a climate sensitivity parameter of 3.1°C for CO₂ doubling, consistent with the best estimate in contemporary IPCC reports (3.0°C).

The baseline (no policy) scenario incurs only \$0.4T in global abatement costs and leads to \$134.2T (trillion dollars) in global climate damages for a total cost of \$134.6T. The climate model component of DICE projects 4.1°C warming by 2100 relative to preindustrial temperatures. Note that this is a higher estimate of warming than many IPCC climate models.

The Optimal Policy scenario barely deviates from the business-as-usual path. It aims for +3.5°C warming, in other words we modestly scale back fossil fuel use and otherwise just live with almost all the warming. This suggests that most CO₂ emissions are less harmful than the policies that would be necessary to abate them. Trying to prevent warming causes costs quickly to outstrip the benefits. Pursuing a goal of capping warming at 2.5°C creates total costs of \$177.8T, which is \$43.2T worse than doing nothing at all. Nordhaus didn't evaluate trying to reach a Paris-type target of 1.5°C warming but it would be even worse.

A subsequent edition of DICE includes higher assumed damages from warming which, not surprisingly leads to more aggressive policy recommendations, as explained in the section below on the Social Cost of Carbon.

11.1.2 Empirical analysis of climate change and economic growth

Many other studies have used econometric methods applied to historical data, instead of IAMs, to study the potential impact of climate change on economic growth. Dell *et al.* (2012, herein DJO12) was an influential study that used a multi-country panel of national-level data spanning 1950 to 2005, in which they matched climate and economic data by averaging temperature from the local grid cell level up to the national level using population weights. They found that warming yields an insignificant positive effect on income growth in rich countries but a significant negative effect in poor countries. Moore and Diaz (2015) modified the DICE model to take that finding into account and concluded that it implied a dramatically higher Social Cost of Carbon due to the compounding effects of income loss over time.

A large subsequent literature has debated the robustness of the DJO12 findings. Burke *et al.* (2015) analyzed a global panel with temperatures averaged up to the national level and found a negative effect on growth from warming in rich and poor countries alike when the national average temperature is above 13°C. Zhao *et al.* (2018) used the G-Econ data set of Nordhaus (2006), which breaks economic activity down to the grid cell level, replicated DJO12-type results on the same subset of countries as used in DJO12 but then showed that on the full global sample warming increases growth in rich countries and poor countries alike, though the positive effect in the latter group is confined to where local temperatures are below about 16°C. Greßer *et al.* (2021) developed a regional economic data set for 1,542 sub-national regions around the world between 2005 and 2015 and found temperature had no effect on growth. Yang *et al.* (2023) updated the DJO12 data set and applied an estimator robust to mixed sample frequencies, finding that while temperature shocks exerted a temporary effect on income levels, they did not have a significant lasting effect on growth rates.

Newell *et al.* (2021) noted that there is no underlying theory to guide econometric model specification in this literature. Taking into account the arbitrary choices of which explanatory variables to include they identified over 800 possible model specifications. Using the Burke *et al.* (2015) data they used an estimation method that accounts for model uncertainty and found that the model form preferred by Burke *et al.* (2015), which implied negative effects of warming on growth even in rich countries, is explicitly excluded by the optimal model selection algorithm. Overall they could not detect a temperature effect on GDP or GDP growth, and they estimated the 95% confidence interval for the impact on global growth as of 2100 even under the exaggerated RCP8.5 warming scenario spans -86 percent to +388 percent. In other words the net effect is likely positive but too uncertain to distinguish from zero.

Barker (2023) criticized the DJO12 assumption that countries can be grouped into fixed “poor” and “rich” categories based on their incomes many decades ago. He noted that many countries were once poor but became rich over time, and if this is taken into account, considered the original temperature effects reported by Dell *et al.* became small and insignificant.

Berg *et al.* (2023) argued that countries shouldn’t be grouped into large Rich/Poor categories because they are too heterogeneous. They instead estimated country-specific temperature response coefficients then grouped countries with similar response coefficients into small panels. They separately estimated responses to global and idiosyncratic local temperature shocks to better identify the climate signal in weather data. Overall, they found countries experiencing negative effects of warming on growth outnumbered those experiencing positive effects, but only temporarily: eventually the effects reverse such that about twice as many countries experience a net positive growth effect. They also found global (as opposed to local) temperature changes are much more likely to benefit growth in poor countries than rich ones. In a simulation to 2100, even using the extreme RCP8.5 scenario they computed the average global GDP loss would be only 1.9% compared to a scenario with no warming. That is, instead of the economy growing 400% it would grow 398.392%. The implication of Nordhaus’ earlier analysis is that trying to prevent the warming would lead to far less than 398.392% growth.

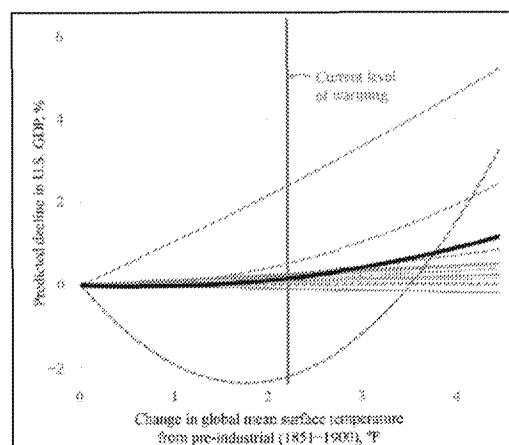


Figure 11.2: Decline in US GDP per degree of warming. Source: CEA-OMB (2023)

To summarize, economists have long considered climate a relatively unimportant factor in economic growth, a view echoed by the IPCC itself in the Fifth Assessment Report. Mainstream climate economics

has recognized that CO₂-induced warming may have some negative economic effects but they are too small to justify aggressive abatement policy, and trying to “stop” or cap global warming even at levels well above the Paris target would be worse than doing nothing. An influential study in 2012 suggested that global warming would harm growth in poor countries but the finding has subsequently been found not to be robust. Studies that take full account of modeling uncertainties either find no evidence of a negative effect on global growth from CO₂ emissions or find poor countries as likely to benefit from it as rich countries.

The expectation that significant global warming would have a small impact on the U.S. economy was acknowledged quietly by the Biden Administration, even as the President was proclaiming a climate emergency. Figure 11.2, from a 2023 CEA-OMB report, shows the expected decrement in U.S. GDP as a function of temperature rise. The colored lines show the results of a dozen peer-reviewed published studies while the solid black line is their average. The figure could be summarized as “a few percent impact for a few degrees of warming”. Given that the economy’s annual growth rate is expected to be 1-2 percent, the impact of a warming globe is indeed negligible.

11.2 Models of the Social Cost of Carbon

The Social Cost of Carbon (SCC) is a tool for quantifying the economic impact of carbon dioxide emissions, helping policymakers weigh the costs and benefits of climate policies. It estimates the damage caused by emitting one additional ton of CO₂, expressed in dollars. More formally, the SCC is the discounted present value of the current and future marginal loss of economic welfare due to an additional ton of CO₂ entering the atmosphere.

11.2.1 Estimating the SCC

Although the literature refers to “estimates” of the SCC, it is not estimated in the way other economic statistics are estimated. For instance, data on market transactions including prices and quantities can be used to estimate the current inflation rate or the growth rate of per capita real Gross Domestic Product, and there are well-understood uncertainties associated with these quantities. But there are no market data available to measure many if not most of the marginal damages or benefits believed to be associated with CO₂ emissions, so these need to be imputed using economic models.

For example, an influential component of some SCC calculations is the perceived social cost associated with changed risk of future mortality due to extreme weather. There is no market in which people can directly attach a price to that risk. At best economists can try to infer such values by looking at transactions in related markets such as real estate or insurance, but isolating the component of price changes attributable to atmospheric CO₂ levels is very difficult.

Economists use IAMs to compute the SCC. Two of the best known are the Climate Framework for Uncertainty, Negotiation and Distribution (“FUND”, Tol 1997) and Nordaus’ DICE. IAMs embed a “damage function” or set of functions relating ambient temperature to local economic conditions. The assumptions embedded in the damage function will largely determine the resulting SCC. IAMs also assume a long-term discount rate or, as in DICE, compute the optimal internal discount rate as part of the solution.

One approach to developing a damage function is to begin with estimates of the costs (or benefits) of warming in specific sectors in countries around the world and aggregate up to a global amount. This was the approach used in FUND. An alternative approach is to develop a simple equation that penalizes global income according to a simple quadratic function of the average global temperature. This approach was used in DICE. In the case of the FUND model many hundreds of parameters had to be selected, whereas in DICE

only three were needed and were originally chosen to assign a predetermined penalty (1.2%) to global output as of 3°C warming, with a quadratic term implying that damages grow with the square of the global average temperature anomaly. Barrage and Nordhaus (2024) recently changed the parameters to increase the penalty at 3°C to 1.6%, and added a discrete additional 1.0% GDP penalty at 3°C warming to account for “tipping points” (discrete large-scale environmental changes triggered by crossing a warming threshold) and a “judgmental adjustment” of 0.5% for excluded impacts at 3°C warming. Not surprisingly the newer version of DICE generates much higher SCC estimates than before.

The concepts of estimation and uncertainty do not readily apply to SCC calculations. By comparison, the question of whether precipitation has trended up or down along the South Carolina coast for the past hundred years can be addressed by collecting rainfall data, estimating a trend parameter and calculating statistical confidence intervals using methods with well-understood mathematical properties. In this way uncertainty can, in principle, be resolved by collecting more data and applying more accurate methods. But no amount of data collection can change the fact that many components of the SCC are unknown and rely on judgment and opinion based on knowledge of the underlying literature on the physical effects of climate change.

SCC calculations are thus best thought of as “if-then” statements: *if* the following assumptions hold, *then* the SCC is \$X per tonne. The list of ‘if’ statements includes the premise that the world’s climate and economy work according to the representation in the IAM. One way this may fail to hold is in the timing of warming. Every IAM assumes a value of the Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity (ECS), which controls the amount of warming that results from CO₂ emissions and can be freely varied for the purpose of generating a distribution of SCC values associated with uncertainties over ECS. But as Roe and Baumann (2013) pointed out, time-to-equilibrium increases with the square of ECS, so an upward adjustment of the ECS parameter without an appropriate slowing down of the adjustment process can yield distorted present value damage estimates. In particular, the upper tail of warming associated with some commonly-used ECS distributions is physically impossible for even a thousand years into the future (Roe and Baumann 2013) yet in an IAM would be realized within a couple of centuries. Failure to align ECS with time-to-equilibrium will lead to an overestimate of the SCC value.

11.2.2 Variations in the SCC

Every level of the IAM calculation includes assumptions, some more influential than others. Key assumptions include the following.

- The discount rate: Climate damages accrue over a long time horizon, and ~~horizon and~~ costs a century or two in the future need to be discounted to the present. The higher the discount rate the smaller the present value of future damages and vice versa. The discount rate represents the opportunity cost of spending money today rather than investing it and then having more to spend tomorrow. Some economists have argued for the use of very low discount rates in SCC calculations, resulting in policy recommendations that favor relatively large immediate investments in CO₂ emission reductions. The downside is that other investments could potentially earn a larger rate of return for society.
- Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity: IAMs have customarily employed a value of 3.0°C or 3.1°C following the IPCC’s guidance. Empirically-estimated ECS values tend to be lower than this (see Chapter 9). Dayaratna ~~et al.~~ (2017, 2020, 2023) have shown that use of lower empirically-derived ECS values dramatically lower the resulting SCC estimate, even when low discount rates are used.
- Damage function coefficients: IAMs assume CO₂ and warming cause net harms that increase exponentially with temperature. More recently, IAMs have also incorporated effects from assumed potential climate tipping points. The FUND model took limited but explicit account of CO₂

fertilization effects in agriculture. Since the coefficients were selected prior the publication of the current evidence of global greening and the magnitude of benefits to crops from elevated CO₂ (see Chapters 2 and 10) the growth effects are likely understated. The DICE model (and others) did not explicitly include any CO₂ fertilization benefit, except to the extent it was taken into account in the literature consulted when picking the damage function coefficients. The damage function in FUND contains a region in which low warming yields net benefits in many regions, a finding which is supported by econometric models of warming and growth (Berg *et al.* 2023) and econometric simulations of agricultural changes (McKittrick 2025). The DICE damage function, by construction, rules out net benefits at any warming level.

- Emission scenarios: IAMs generate SCC estimates that increase as the pre-existing concentration of CO₂ increases. Consequently the value of damages later in the century will be higher, depending on the assumed baseline emissions over the coming decades.
- Abatement costs: IAMs represent the cost to the economy of reducing CO₂ emissions. If CO₂ emission reductions are assumed to be inexpensive, then the model will conclude that the optimal policy should aim for deeper emission cuts and vice versa.

It is informative to ascertain whether SCC results are invariant to changes in some assumptions. But when different assumptions result in higher or lower SCC values, the change in the SCC value does not provide *prima facie* evidence about the validity of the assumptions. For example, in 2023 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency raised its preferred SCC value about 5-fold over the estimates it had issued ten years earlier. This is not because new data had been collected or better mathematical methods had been invented, but because new assumptions had been used, and the validity of those assumptions was a separate question. One was that global agricultural damages were far higher than previously assumed, based on an analysis in Moore *et al.* (2017). But as discussed in Chapter 10, McKittrick (2025) showed that Moore *et al.* (2017) had used a database in which half the CO₂ change observations were missing. When as many of those observations as possible were recovered from underlying sources and the analysis was rerun, the projected crop yield losses disappeared and turned into gains at all warming levels. Hence the portion of the EPA's SCC revision attributable to agricultural yield losses was unwarranted.

11.2.3 Evidence for low SCC

Chapter 2 reviewed evidence on climate change and greening, and Chapter 10 looked at climate change and US agriculture. Evidence shows that CO₂ fertilization has a stronger beneficial effect on agriculture than was known at the time that IAMs like DICE and FUND were parameterized. In particular Haverd *et al.* (2020) found the observed CO₂ fertilization rate has been almost double what had been predicted by crop models. Dayaratna *et al.* (2023) used the updated empirical ECS distribution estimate of Lewis (2022), which assimilates modern instrumental and paleoclimatic temperature records, and allowed for a 30 percent gain in the CO₂ fertilization benefit in the FUND model, and found that, even at a low discount rate of 2.5 percent, the median SCC as of 2050 is only \$18.67, with a 24 percent probability of the true value being negative. At a five percent discount rate the median SCC value is negative until the mid-2040s and at 2050 was only \$0.37 with a 49 percent probability of being negative. Thus, under reasonable assumptions a mainstream IAM using updated scientific inputs yield evidence consistent with the SCC not being significantly greater than zero.

It should also be noted that the SCC is focused on the social costs of CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel use. It does not measure the private marginal benefits to consumers and society from the availability of fossil fuels. Public willingness to pay for fuels of all types indicates the value to society of reliable, abundant fossil energy. Tol (2017) estimates that the private benefit of carbon is large relative to the social cost. This can be illustrated by noting that the price of a gallon of gas indicates the marginal value to the consumer of the fuel. Suppose we assume a relatively high Social Cost of Carbon of, say, \$75 per tonne. Deflated by a

MCPF value of 1.5 that would result in a carbon tax of \$50 per tonne, which equates to about 44 cents per gallon of gas (Lavelle, 2019). A pre-tax price of \$3.00 per gallon would imply the marginal social benefit of the fuel is nearly seven times the marginal social cost.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.25"

11.2.4 Tipping points

SCC calculations typically consider gradual impacts of a warming climate, such as slowly-melting glaciers and increasing average temperature. A driver of potentially high values of the Social Cost of Carbon (SCC) is the introduction into models of discrete catastrophic outcomes associated with abrupt changes (Dietz *et al.*, 2021). They are often referred to as “tipping points.”

The term “tipping point” mingles two different physical concepts that pose different research challenges. Many physical systems are inherently stable unless acted upon with sufficient external energy. For example an ice cap might remain intact over a wide range of temperatures but once the temperature crosses the 0°C threshold it melts. Such discontinuities are ubiquitous in nature and require an external force. Whether the force needs to be large relative to the size of the system depends on the underlying stability of the system.

A different type of tipping point is called a *bifurcation* and arises from the study of the internal dynamics of nonlinear systems (Crawford, 1991). Many systems have been observed to have more than one equilibrium point and can move between them with minimal or no external influence. For example a weather system might have two different equilibrium states: one calm and one with a tornado. A transition from one to another can happen either with no external force or with a minuscule change, such as a flap of the proverbial butterfly’s wings (Shen *et al.*, 2014). The term “tipping point” is sometimes used to mean a bifurcation of this type and implies instability inherent in the system itself, which is not necessarily dependent on outside forces. It depends, instead, on parameters of the system taking values that support the emergence of bifurcations (Crawford, 1991).

The two different concepts imply different research questions. Regarding the first we are interested in whether components of the climate system are susceptible to abrupt discontinuities in response to sufficiently-large anthropogenic forcing. Regarding the second we are interested in whether the Earth’s climate system has inherent bifurcations that imply the possibility of abrupt transitions with or without external forcing.

Models have been developed that imply the latter is a possibility. Kypke *et al.* (2020) presented a simple climate model in which the GHG concentration is one of the parameters that controls the emergence of bifurcations of the Arctic climate to one with both cold and warm equilibria. If sufficiently high GHG forcing combined with a sufficiently high rate of ocean heat transport are imposed a bifurcation becomes possible. More generally GCMs have been observed to contain bifurcations and multiple equilibria (Brunetti and Ragon, 2023).

The possible existence of bifurcations in the Earth’s climate system implies abrupt transitions are possible, not just in response to large forcing but also to small perturbations ~~as well~~. This places tipping points into the category of low-likelihood and potentially catastrophic events, such as large meteor strikes. A key question to ask is whether those kinds of tipping points can be predicted. Current research has not resolved that question (Dakos *et al.*, 2024) and indeed may not be able to since one implication of the “butterfly effect” is the existence of predictability boundaries of nonlinear systems (Palmer *et al.*, 2014). It is therefore not obvious how to incorporate such possibilities into SCC calculations. Small variations in assumptions will lead to arbitrarily large variations in the resulting SCC with no grounds for choosing among them. If such tipping points are possible the most appropriate stance for economic policy is to maximize resilience to any form of external catastrophe since it is unlikely we could predict it or prevent it from happening.

The IPCC AR6 (Chapter 1) focuses mainly on the first type of tipping point, namely an abrupt change in response to external forcing. This is also the meaning associated with popular usage of the “tipping point” concept in discussions of climate change (see [[HYPERLINK "https://report-2023.global-tipping-points.org/what-is-a-tipping-point/"](https://report-2023.global-tipping-points.org/what-is-a-tipping-point/)] for example). As summarized by the IPCC AR6, there is evidence of abrupt change in the paleoclimate record, and some of these events have been interpreted as tipping points. Some projections with Earth System Models for example have produced tipping points such as Amazon forest dieback in response to specified values of CO₂ concentration or temperature increases.

The alarm surrounding climate tipping points is reflected by *The Global Tipping Points Report* that was launched at the COP28 on 6 December 2023 (Lenton *et al.*, 2023). It identifies more than 25 parts of the climate system said to constitute tipping points. What gets classified as a climate “tipping point” is a moving target. The most common examples in the literature and assessment reports include: Greenland ice sheet disintegration, West Antarctic ice sheet disintegration, summertime disappearance of Arctic sea ice, Amazon rainforest dieback, coral reef dieoff, thawing of permafrost and methane hydrates, Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation collapse, boreal forest shift, West African monsoon shift, and Indian Monsoon shift.

All such tipping points require a certain amount of system instability in order to exhibit an abrupt transition in response to warming. For this reason there seems to be very little to discriminate between a tipping event and natural climate variability. Natural climate variability has in the past produced shifts in the West African and Indian monsoons, Amazon forest and coral reef dieback, and disintegration of the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets. These impacts can be reversed on the decadal timescales associated with natural climate variability and ecosystem responses.

Some abrupt changes are potentially more consequential, including collapse of the West Antarctic ice sheet and collapse of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC). The IPCC AR6 WGI Summary for Policy Makers states:

The Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation is very likely to weaken over the 21st century for all emission scenarios. While there is high confidence in the 21st century decline, there is only low confidence in the magnitude of the trend. There is medium confidence that there will not be an abrupt collapse before 2100. (C.3.4)

There is limited evidence for low-likelihood, high-impact outcomes (resulting from ice-sheet instability processes characterized by deep uncertainty and in some cases involving tipping points) that would strongly increase ice loss from the Antarctic Ice Sheet for centuries under high GHG emissions scenarios (e.g., SSP5-8.5). (B.5.2)

For the purpose of SCC calculations the research question implied by this type of tipping point is whether such events have been observed in the past in climate conditions similar to what we currently experience or will in the near future. The IPCC AR6 finds little evidence for impending collapse of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation or the West Antarctic ice sheet. It finds there is no tipping point associated with Arctic Sea ice (AR6 Technical Summary p. 76)

Dietz *et al.* incorporated several potential tipping points (abrupt changes) into an SCC model and found they added about 25 percent to the estimate, mainly associated with thawing permafrost and release of methane hydrates. However the IPCC considers this scenario *very unlikely* (AR6 Technical Summary p. 107).

In summary, there may be unknown bifurcation tipping points that are associated with natural climate processes, but this possibility does not translate into specific guidance on the SCC. There are potential abrupt change points in the climate system in response to warming, although the IPCC assigns low

probabilities to most, including the largest ones. When these have been taken into account the result is only a modest increase in the SCC value in the 21st century.

11.2.5 Are there alternatives?

It is increasingly being argued that the SCC is too variable to be useful for policymakers. Cambridge Econometrics (Thoung, 2017) stated it's "time to kill it" due to uncertainties. The UK and EU no longer use SCC for policy appraisal, opting for "target-consistent" carbon pricing (UK Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2022, Dunne 2017). However, the uncertainty of SCC estimates doesn't mean that other regulatory measures are inherently better or more efficient. Many emissions regulations (such as electric vehicle mandates, renewable energy mandates, energy efficiency regulations and bans on certain types of home appliances) cost far more per tonne of abatement than any mainstream SCC estimate, which is sufficient for establishing that they fail a cost-benefit test.

References

- AR6: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report (2021) Working Group I Contribution. [HYPERLINK "<http://www.ipcc.ch>"].
- Arent, D.J., R.S.J. Tol, E. Faust, J.P. Hella, S. Kumar, K.M. Strzepek, F.L. Tóth, and D. Yan (2014) Key economic sectors and services. In: Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Field, C.B., V.R. Barros, D.J. Dokken, K.J. Mach, M.D. Mastrandrea, T.E. Bilir, M. Chatterjee, K.L. Ebi, Y.O. Estrada, R.C. Genova, B. Girma, E.S. Kissel, A.N. Levy, S. MacCracken, P.R. Mastrandrea, and L.L. White (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA, pp. 659-708. [HYPERLINK "https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/WGIIAR5-Chap10_FINAL.pdf"]
- Barker, D. (2023) Temperature Shocks and Economic Growth: Comment on Dell, Jones, and Olken. *Econ Journal Watch* 20(2) 234-253 [HYPERLINK "<https://econjwatch.org/articles/temperature-shocks-and-economic-growth-comment-on-dell-jones-and-olken>"]
- Barrage, Lint and William Nordhaus (2024) Policies, projections, and the social cost of carbon: Results from the DICE-2023 model. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 121 (13) e2312030121 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2312030121>"]
- Berg, Kimberly, Chadwick C Curtis and Nelson Mark. (2021) GDP and temperature: Evidence on cross-country response heterogeneity. NBER Working Paper 31327 June 2023 [HYPERLINK "<http://www.nber.org/papers/w31327>"]
- Blickle, Kristian; Sarah N. Hamerling, and Donald P. Morgan (2021) : How bad are weather disasters for banks?, Staff Reports, No. 990, Federal Reserve Bank of New York, New York, NY [HYPERLINK "<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/247913/1/sr990.pdf>"]
- Brunetti, Maura and Charline Ragon (2023) Attractors and bifurcation diagrams in complex climate models. *Physical Review E* 107 054214 [HYPERLINK "<https://journals.aps.org/pre/abstract/10.1103/PhysRevE.107.054214>"]
- Burke, Marshall, Solomon M Hsiang, and Edward Miguel (2015). Global non-linear effect of temperature on economic production. *Nature*, 527(7577):235–239.
- Council of Economic Advisors-Office of Management and Budget (CEA-OMB 2023) Methodologies and considerations for integrating the physical and transition risks of climate change into macroeconomic

- forecasting for the president's budget. March 13, 2023. [[HYPERLINK "https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CEA-OMB-White-Paper.pdf"](https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CEA-OMB-White-Paper.pdf)]
- Crawford, John D (1991) Introduction to Bifurcation Theory. *Reviews of Modern Physics* 63(4) October 1991 991–1037.
- Dakos, Vasilis, Chris Boulton, Joshua Buxton ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2024) Tipping point detection and early warnings in climate, ecological, and human systems. *Earth System Dynamics* 15 1117–1135 [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.5194/esd-15-1117-2024"](https://doi.org/10.5194/esd-15-1117-2024)]
- Dayaratna, Kevin and Ross McKittrick (2023) "Reply to comment on "climate sensitivity, agricultural productivity and the social cost of carbon in fund" by Philip Meyer" *Environmental Economics and Policy Studies* 2023 link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10018-023-00364-2
- Dayaratna, Kevin, Ross McKittrick and David Kreutzer (2017) Empirically-Constrained Climate Sensitivity and the Social Cost of Carbon. *Climate Change Economics* April 2017 DOI: [[HYPERLINK "https://dx.doi.org/10.1142/S2010007817500063"](https://dx.doi.org/10.1142/S2010007817500063)]
- Dayaratna, Kevin, Ross McKittrick and Patrick J. Michaels (2020) Climate Sensitivity, Agricultural Productivity and the Social Cost of Carbon in FUND. *Environmental Economics and Policy Studies* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10018-020-00263-w>
- Dell, Melissa, Benjamin F. Jones, and Benjamin A. Olken (2012). Temperature shocks and economic growth: Evidence from the last half century. *American economic journal: Macroeconomics*, 4(3):66–95, 2012. ISSN 1945-7707.
- Dietz, S., J. Rising, T. Stoerk, G. Wagner (2021) Economic impact of tipping points in the climate system. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 2021 Vol. 118 No. 34 e2103081118
- Dunne, Daisy (2017), "Q&A: The Social Cost of Carbon," Carbon Brief, February 14, 2017, [[HYPERLINK "https://www.carbonbrief.org/qa-social-cost-carbon/"](https://www.carbonbrief.org/qa-social-cost-carbon/)]
- Formetta, Giuseppe and Luc Feyen (2019) Empirical evidence of declining global vulnerability to climate-related hazards. *Global Environmental Change* 57 101920 [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.05.004"](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.05.004)]
- Greßer, Christina, Daniel Meierrieks, and David Stadelmann (2021) The link between regional temperature and regional incomes: econometric evidence with sub-national data. *Economic Policy*, 36(107):523–550, 2021.
- Haverd, V., Raupach, M., Briggs, P., ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (2020). Higher than expected CO₂ fertilization inferred from leaf to global observations. *Global Change Biology*, 26, 2390–2402.
- Hu, Bin and Ross McKittrick (2015) Climatic Variations and the Market Value of Insurance Firms. *Journal of Insurance Issues* Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 92-111 [[HYPERLINK "https://www.jstor.org/stable/43741103"](https://www.jstor.org/stable/43741103)]
- Kypke, K. L., Langford, W. F., and Willms, A. R.: Anthropocene climate bifurcation, *Nonlin. Processes Geophys.*, 27, 391–409, <https://doi.org/10.5194/npg-27-391-2020>, 2020.
- Lavelle, Marianne (2019) Carbon Tax Plans: How They Compare and Why Oil Giants Support One of Them. *Inside Climate News* March 7, 2019 [[HYPERLINK "https://insideclimatenews.org/news/07032019/carbon-tax-proposals-compare-baker-shultz-exxon-conocophillips-ccl-congress/"](https://insideclimatenews.org/news/07032019/carbon-tax-proposals-compare-baker-shultz-exxon-conocophillips-ccl-congress/)]
- Lenton, T.M., D.I. Armstrong McKay, ~~et al.~~ *et al.* (eds) (2023) *The Global Tipping Points Report 2023*. University of Exeter, Exeter, UK. [[HYPERLINK "https://report-2023.global-tipping-points.org/"](https://report-2023.global-tipping-points.org/)]
- Lewis, N., (2013) An objective Bayesian, improved approach for applying optimal fingerprint techniques to estimate climate sensitivity. *Journal of Climate*, 26, 7414-7429. [[HYPERLINK "https://journals.ametsoc.org/doi/abs/10.1175/JCLI-D-12-00473.1"](https://journals.ametsoc.org/doi/abs/10.1175/JCLI-D-12-00473.1)]
- McKittrick, Ross R. (2025) Extended Crop Yield Meta-analysis Data do not Support Upward SCC Revision. *Scientific Reports* 15 article 5575 [[HYPERLINK "https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-025-90254-2"](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-025-90254-2)]
- Moore, Frances C. and Delavane B. Diaz (2015) Temperature impacts on economic growth warrant stringent mitigation policy. *Nature Climate Change*, 5(2):127–131, 2015. ISSN 1758-678X.

- Moore FC, Baldos U, Hertel T, Diaz D (2017) Newscience of climate change impacts on agriculture implies higher social cost of carbon. *Nature Communications* 8:1607. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-017-01792-x"]
- Newell, Richard G., Brian C. Prest, and Steven E. Sexton (2021). The GDP-temperature relationship: Implications for climate change damages. *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, 108 [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeem.2021.102445"]
- Nordhaus, William (2006). Geography and macroeconomics: New data and new findings. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 103(10):3510–3517, 2006. ISSN 0027-8424.
- Nordhaus, William. (2018) Projections and Uncertainties About Climate Change in an Era of Minimal Climate Policies. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* August 2018, 10(3): 333-360. [HYPERLINK "https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/pol.20170046"]
- Nordhaus, W. (1993) Optimal Greenhouse-Gas Reductions and Tax Policy in the "DICE" Model *American Economic Review* Vol. 83, No. 2, (Papers and Proceedings) pp.313-317.
- Palmer, T.N, A Döring and G Seregin (2014) The real butterfly effect. *Nonlinearity* 27(9) 10.1088/0951-7715/27/9/R123 [HYPERLINK "https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/0951-7715/27/9/R123/meta"]
- Parry, Ian, Robertson C. Williams III and Lawrence H. Goulder (1999). "When Can Carbon Abatement Policies Increase Welfare? The Fundamental Role of Distorted Factor Markets." *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management* 37: 52–84.
- Pielke Jr., Roger (2018): Tracking progress on the economic costs of disasters under the indicators of the sustainable development goals, *Environmental Hazards*, DOI: 10.1080/17477891.2018.1540343
- Pielke Jr., Roger (2020) Economic 'normalisation' of disaster losses 1998–2020: a literature review and assessment," *Environmental Hazards*, 2020, pp. 1-19
- Pielke Jr., Roger (2022) Global disaster losses: 1990-2023 Substack essay [HYPERLINK "https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/global-disaster-losses1990-2023"]
- Resources for the Future (2025) "Social Cost of Carbon Explorer," Resources for the Future website, accessed April 22, 2025, [HYPERLINK "https://www.rff.org/publications/data-tools/scc-explorer/"]
- Roe, Gerard H. and Yoram Bauman (2013) Climate Sensitivity: Should the climate tail wag the policy dog? *Climatic Change* (2013) 117:647–662 DOI 10.1007/s10584-012-0582-6
- Schelling, Thomas C (1992) Some economics of global warming. *The American Economic Review*, 82 (1):1–14.
- Shen, Bo-Wen, Roger A Pielke Sr and Xubin Zeng (2023) The 50th Anniversary of the Metaphorical Butterfly Effect since Lorenz (1972): Multistability, Multiscale Predictability, and Sensitivity in Numerical Models. *Atmosphere* 2023 14(8) [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.3390/atmos14081279"]
- Storm, S (2017) "How the Invisible Hand is Supposed to Adjust the Natural Thermostat: A Guide for the Perplexed." *Science and Engineering Ethics* vol 23: 1307—1331.
- Thoung, Chris (2017) "Is It Time to Kill Off the Social Cost of Carbon?" Cambridge Econometrics Blog, September 14, 2017, [HYPERLINK "https://www.camecon.com/blog/time-kill-social-cost-carbon/"]
- Tol, Richard S.J. (1997) On the optimal control of carbon dioxide emissions: an application of FUND *Environmental Modeling and Assessment* 2: 151—163.
- Tol, Richard S.J. (2017). "The Private Benefit of Carbon and its Social Cost," Working Paper Series 0717, Department of Economics, University of Sussex Business School. [HYPERLINK "https://ideas.repec.org/p/sus/susewp/0717.html"]
- UK Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (2022). "Carbon Valuation." GOV.UK, last updated April 4, 2022. [HYPERLINK "https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/carbon-valuation--2"]
- US Environmental Protection Agency (2023) Supplementary Material for the Regulatory Impact Analysis for the Final Rulemaking, "Standards of Performance for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources and Emissions Guidelines for Existing Sources: Oil and Natural Gas Sector Climate Review", EPA

Report on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases: Estimates Incorporating Recent Scientific Advances, November 2023, [HYPERLINK "https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-12/epa_scghg_2023_report_final.pdf"] accessed February 28, 2024.

Yang, Yimin, Fei Jia, and Haoran Li. Estimation of panel data models with mixed sampling frequencies (2023). *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, 85(3):514–544.

Zhao, Xiaobing, Mason Gerety, and Nicolai V. Kuminoff (2018) Revisiting the temperature-economic growth relationship using global subnational data. *Journal of environmental management*, 223:537–544, 2018.

12 GLOBAL CLIMATE IMPACTS OF U.S. EMISSIONS POLICIES

Chapter Summary

U.S. policy actions are expected to have undetectably small direct impacts on the global climate and any effects will emerge only with long delays.

12.1 The scale problem

The emissions rates and atmospheric concentrations of criteria air contaminants are closely connected because their lifetimes are short and their concentrations are small; when local emissions are reduced the local pollution concentration drops rapidly, usually within a few days. But the global average CO₂ concentration behaves very differently, since emissions mix globally and the global carbon cycle is vast and slow. Any change in local CO₂ emissions today will have only a very small global effect, and only with a long delay.

Following the emission of a pulse (release) of CO₂ into the atmosphere only about 40 ± 15 percent of the emitted CO₂ will have been sequestered after twenty years. That fraction rises to 75 ± 10 percent after a thousand years, and the remainder will be gradually removed over the ensuing tens of thousands of years (Ciais *et al.*, 2013, pp. 472-473). Consequently, any reduction in U.S. emissions would only modestly slow, but not prevent, the rise of global CO₂ concentration. And even if global emissions were to stop tomorrow, it would take decades or centuries to see a meaningful reduction in the global CO₂ concentration and hence human influences on the climate.

Reducing the atmospheric stock of CO₂ would require emissions to fall below the natural sequestration rate, assuming the entire increase is anthropogenic. Since that rate has been averaging about 50% of emissions in recent decades, a reduction of global emissions by 50% would (at least temporarily) halt the rise in atmospheric CO₂. The 1997 Kyoto Protocol proposed to cap industrial nations' CO₂ emissions at a modest five percent below 1990 levels by the year 2012. Even though this policy was too difficult for most nations to implement, full compliance would not have substantially reduced atmospheric CO₂ levels. It would only have slightly slowed CO₂ growth, reaching the projected year 2100 level in 2105 instead (Wigley, 1998). Lomborg (2016) estimated that full compliance with the Paris Accord would not stop warming, it would only prevent about 0.1C warming and delay hitting the baseline year 2100 temperature levels by about a decade.

Thus, in contrast with conventional air pollution control, even drastic local actions will have negligible local effects, and only with a long delay. The practice of referring to unilateral U.S. reductions as “combating climate change” or “taking action on climate” therefore reflects a profound misunderstanding of the scale of the issue.

12.2 Case study: U.S. motor vehicle emissions

The scale problem can be illustrated with reference to U.S. motor vehicles. The EPA's 2009 Endangerment Finding focused on CO₂ emissions from cars and light-duty trucks in the U.S. because Section 202(a) of Clean Air Act mandates the EPA to set emissions standards for motor vehicles if pollutants are found to endanger public health or welfare. The 2009 Endangerment Finding therefore obligated the EPA to regulate emissions from new motor vehicles, ostensibly to reduce or eliminate climate-related harms to the US public.

Two questions that naturally arise are: (1) How large a reduction in CO₂ emissions would result from such regulation? and (2) What would be the climate impact of such regulation?

The first question can be addressed by comparing US vehicle-based CO₂ emissions to the global total. The second question can be addressed by using the fact that the reduction in global warming would be, according to the models relied upon by the EPA, proportional to the reduction in global emissions, keeping in mind that the change in the CO₂ content of the atmosphere in any given year is the result of total global CO₂ emissions, not just U.S. emissions.

In 2022, the emissions from U.S. cars and light duty trucks totaled 1.05 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide (GtCO₂, EPA 2024). Meanwhile global CO₂ emissions from energy use totaled 34.6 GtCO₂ (Energy Institute 2024). Hence U.S. cars and light trucks account for only 3.0% of global energy-related CO₂ emissions. To a first approximation we can say that even eliminating all US vehicle-based emissions would change the multidecadal warming trend by at most 3%. For the period 1979-2023, which has the most extensive global coverage of a variety of weather data types, warming trends are determined to a precision of about $\pm 15\%$, so the impact of reducing the rate of global warming by eliminating U.S. vehicle CO₂ emissions would be far below the limits of measurability. In 2022, the emissions from U.S. cars and light duty trucks totaled 1.05 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide (GtCO₂, EPA 2024). Meanwhile global CO₂ emissions from energy use totaled 34.6 GtCO₂ (Energy Institute 2024). Hence U.S. cars and light trucks account for only 3.0% of global energy-related CO₂ emissions. To a first approximation we can say that even eliminating all US vehicle-based emissions would change the multidecadal warming trend by at most 3%. For the period 1979-2023, which has the most extensive global coverage of a variety of weather data types, warming trends are determined to a precision of about $\pm 15\%$, so the impact of reducing the rate of global warming by eliminating U.S. vehicle CO₂ emissions would be far below the limits of measurability.

Commented [SK3]: This is not correct because of other forcing components

Given that global-average temperature is the most direct climate change metric, impacts on any secondary climate metrics (e.g. severe weather, floods, drought, etc.) from reducing U.S. vehicle CO₂ emissions would be even less measurable.

Consequently, in contrast to the case of local air contaminants like particulates and ozone, even the most aggressive regulatory actions on GHG emissions from U.S. vehicles cannot be expected to remediate alleged climate dangers to the US public on any even remotely-measurable scale.

References

- Ciais, P., C. Sabine, G. Bala, L. Bopp, V. Brovkin, et al. et al. (2013): Carbon and Other Biogeochemical Cycles. In: Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Stocker, T.F., D. Qin, G.-K. Plattner, M. Tignor, et al. et al. (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA
- EPA (2024) *Fast Facts: U.S. Transportation Sector Greenhouse Gas Emissions 1990-2022*. Available online at [HYPERLINK "https://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyPDF.cgi?Dockey=P101AKR0.pdf"]
- Energy Institute (2024) Statistical Review of World Energy. Available online at [HYPERLINK "https://www.energyinst.org/statistical-review"]
- Lomborg, Bjorn (2016) "Impact of Current Climate Proposals" *Global Policy* 7(1) 109—118. Available at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1758-5899.12295/full>.
- Wigley, T.M.L. (1998). "The Kyoto Protocol: CO₂, CH₄ and climate implications." *Geophysical Research Letters* 25(13), 2285-2288

OUO – Official Use Only – OUO – Confidential Draft – Pre-Review – Do Not Distribute

GLOSSARY

2XCO₂: Doubling of the atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂), a commonly used baseline for addressing climate change. In 2025, atmospheric CO₂ concentrations were approximately 50% of the way to 2XCO₂ compared to 1800.

ABATEMENT: In the context of environmental policy, the reduction of emissions.

ACE (Accumulated Cyclone Energy): A statistical measure of a tropical cyclone's energy accumulated over its lifetime, calculated from a summation of the square of maximum sustained wind speeds.

ACIDIFICATION: A commonly used term for the reduction in ocean pH from more alkaline to less alkaline values.

ACRIM (Active Cavity Radiometer Irradiance Monitor) GAP: the gap in total solar irradiance data between 1989 and 1991 caused by a delay in the launch of a satellite-borne monitor in time to overlap and intercalibrate with the prior system.

AEROSOLS: Tiny solid or liquid particles suspended in the air.

ALKALINE: Having a chemical pH greater than 7.0. The "opposite" of acidic, which means a pH less than 7.0.

AMBIENT: Relating to the immediate surroundings of something.

ANTHROPOGENIC: Created by humans.

AR (Assessment Reports): Periodic assessments published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change evaluating current knowledge of the climate system, global change, and associated issues. An AR now consists of reports from three working groups, the first (WG1) concerned with physical science and the others concerned with societal impacts and mitigation strategies. The most recent was the AR6.

ATTRIBUTION: Assertion of a causal relation, chiefly from anthropogenic GHG emissions to observed climate patterns.

AUTOCORRELATION: The phenomenon in which the current value of a random time series variable is correlated with its value in a previous time period.

BIOMASS: The total quantity or weight of organic matter in a given area or volume.

CARBON: The 6th element in the periodic table. Popularly used as a shorthand term for carbon dioxide.

CMIP (Coupled Model Intercomparison Project): The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's organized effort to compare many different global ocean-atmosphere climate models when they are all forced with the same emissions scenario(s). The two most recent were the CMIP5 and CMIP6 for, respectively, AR5 and AR6.

CONUS: The contiguous 48 U.S. states.

DICE (Dynamic Integrated model of the Climate and Economy): An Integrated Assessment Model developed by William Nordhaus in 1993.

DISCOUNT RATE: The interest rate used to convert future costs and benefits into their present value. Varies inversely with present value so a high discount rate reduces the present value of future costs and benefits.

DRY ICE: Frozen carbon dioxide.

ECONOMETRICS: The branch of economics concerned with the use of statistical methods (chiefly multiple regression) to analyse economic systems.

ECS (Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity): The total amount of eventual global-average surface warming in response to a hypothetical doubling of the atmospheric CO₂ concentration compared to pre-Industrial levels.

EL NIÑO: The warm phase of the El Niño – Southern Oscillation, involving weaker upwelling of cold water off the South American coast and weaker Pacific trade winds.

EMISSIONS SCENARIO: An assumed scenario of future greenhouse gas emissions (or resulting atmospheric concentrations) based upon assumptions regarding global economic activity, the prevalence of fossil fuel use, and (sometimes) global carbon cycle model estimates of the rate of CO₂ uptake by land and ocean.

ENDANGERMENT FINDING(EF): The 2009 finding by the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency that emissions of well-mixed greenhouse gases (primarily CO₂) endanger human health and welfare.

ENSO: El Niño – Southern Oscillation, a prominent natural climate fluctuation involving year-to-year variations in the upwelling of cold water off the equatorial coast of South America and associated strengthening or weakening of trade winds across the Pacific Ocean.

FACE: (Free-Air CO₂ Enrichment) Large-scale open-air studies that expose plants to elevated CO₂ levels, simulating future climate scenarios.

FOSSIL FUEL: A natural hydrocarbon fuel such as coal, oil, or natural gas formed in the geological past from the remains of living organisms.

FUND (Framework for Uncertainty, Negotiation, and Distribution): An Integrated Assessment Model developed by Richard Tol in 1997.

GBR (Great Barrier Reef): The world's largest coral reef ecosystem located off the northeast coast of Australia.

GDP (Gross Domestic Product): Total market value of all the final goods and services produced within a country's border, usually over one year.

GHCN (Global Historical Climatology Network): A time-varying number of globally distributed weather stations making hourly, daily, or monthly measurements of precipitation, temperature and sometimes snowfall and snow depth.

GLOBAL GREENING: The satellite-observed increase in greenness in most vegetated land areas observed since the early 1980s.

GNP (Gross National Product): Total market value of all the final goods and services produced by the citizens of a country, including exports and imports, usually over one year.

GDP (Gross National Product): Total market value of all the domestically-produced final goods and services produced by the citizens of a country, usually over one year.

GREENHOUSE EFFECT (GHE): The tendency for any planetary atmosphere containing greenhouse gases to be warmer in the lowest layers than if those gases did not exist.

GREENHOUSE GAS (GHG): An atmospheric gas that absorbs and emits infrared radiation, especially water vapor, CO₂, and methane.

HURST PHENOMENON: See long term persistence.

HYDROLOGY: The study of the movement of water, especially on land and in the atmosphere.

IAM (Integrated Assessment Model): A computerized tool that combines economics, climate science, and social sciences to provide quantitative relationships between human and Earth systems, helping to inform policy decisions.

IEA (International Energy Agency): A Paris-based intergovernmental organization, established in 1974, that provides policy recommendations, analysis and data on the global energy sector.

IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change): A panel of international experts and governmental representatives established by the United Nations and World Meteorological Organization in 1988 to provide governments at all levels with scientific information that they can use to develop climate policies.

IR (Infrared): Heat radiation that all solid objects and greenhouse gases emit by virtue of their temperature.

LA NIÑA: The cool phase of ENSO, involving stronger upwelling of cold water off the South American coast and stronger Pacific trade winds.

LONG TERM PERSISTENCE (LTP, or HURST PHENOMENON): A form of autocorrelation in which random fluctuations induce long term but not permanent changes in the mean value of a series, which shows up in some climate data series as cyclical or trending patterns on short time scales.

MAIZE: Corn.

MODEL: A computer code or collection of codes which quantify our knowledge of various processes and the interactions between those processes.

MORTALITY: Death or number of deaths, usually expressed for a specific population and period.

NCA (National Climate Assessment): A periodic report mandated by the Global Change Research Act of 1990 summarizing the impact of climate change on the United States. There have been five NCA reports: NCA1 (2000), NCA2 (2009), NCA3 (2014), NCA4 (2017-18), and NCA5 (2023).

OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development): A group of 38 member countries that have a democratic system of government and free economic systems.

PALEOCLIMATE: Climate of the distant past, before modern weather instruments were widely used (typically pre-1850), necessitating the use of “proxy” measurements such as tree rings, ice core, pollen records, etc.

PDI (Power Dissipation Index): A statistical estimate of the accumulated destructive potential of a tropical cyclone over time, calculated as a summation of the cube of the maximum sustained wind speeds.

PHOTOSYNTHESIS: The process by which plants grow, requiring carbon dioxide, water, and light at sufficiently warm temperatures (10 to 35 deg. C for optimal function).

PPM: Parts per million, a measure of the concentration of a substance in (for example) the atmosphere

PRE-INDUSTRIAL: The near-term historical period before which human greenhouse gas emissions were considered significant, usually assumed to be the mid-1700s.

RADIATIVE FEEDBACK: A change in the balance between absorbed solar radiation and emitted infrared (IR) radiation, referenced to the top of the atmosphere, caused by changes in surface temperature.

RADIATIVE FORCING: The change in the balance between absorbed solar radiation and emitted infrared (IR) radiation, referenced to the top of the atmosphere, caused by changes in greenhouse gases, anthropogenic aerosols, volcanoes, etc.

RCP (Representative Concentration Pathway) SCENARIOS: Different scenarios for future greenhouse gas emissions and their impact on the atmosphere, introduced in the IPCC’s Fifth Assessment Report (AR5). RCP scenarios have a number label (e.g. RCP6.0) indicating how much radiative forcing they

assume in 2100 relative to pre-Industrial times, in Watts per square meter. RCP4.5 and RCP6.0 are intermediate scenarios, whereas RCP8.5 is an extreme scenario with very large future emissions of greenhouse gases.

REGRESSION: A statistical method for selecting the coefficients of a linear equation to explain the behaviour of a dependent variable in terms of variations in one or more explanatory variables.

RICARDIAN ANALYSIS: A method used in environmental economics named after David Ricardo to estimate the economic impacts of climate change, particularly on agriculture, by making use of the hypothesis that expected changes in the return to future agricultural activity will be capitalized into current land values.

SCC (Social Cost of Carbon): An estimate of the net economic damages, measured in present-value dollars, caused by emitting one additional ton of CO₂ into the atmosphere.

SSP (Shared Socioeconomic Pathway) SCENARIOS: Different scenarios for future greenhouse gas emissions and their impact on the atmosphere, introduced in the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report (AR6). Some of the SSP scenarios are analogous to the older RCP scenarios, for purposes of continuity and comparison to earlier climate model assessments.

TC: Tropical cyclone.

TMAX: The daily maximum surface air temperature.

TMIN: The daily minimum surface air temperature.

TOA: Top of atmosphere.

TOXICOLOGY: The study of the adverse effects of chemical substances on living organisms.

TREND: A coefficient, usually estimated using linear regression, representing the slope of a line of best fit through a time series of data, indicating any tendency for the series mean to move up or down over time.

TSI (Total Solar Irradiance): The measure of the total amount of incident solar radiation per unit area, including all wavelengths of electromagnetic radiation, that reaches the Earth's atmosphere. Typically shown in units of watts per square meter (W/m²).

UHI (Urban Heat Island): The tendency for inhabited areas to be warmer than their rural surroundings, due to the replacement of natural land and vegetation with roads, parking lots, buildings, and waste heat sources.

USHCN: The U.S. Historical Climatology Network, consisting of quality-controlled temperature and precipitation data from 1,218 surface weather stations.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

John Christy, Ph.D. is the Distinguished Professor of Atmospheric and Earth Sciences and Alabama's State Climatologist at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. He has a B.A. (Mathematics) from CSU Fresno and an M.S. and Ph.D. (Atmospheric Sciences) from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. He is a Fellow of the American Meteorological Society and recipient of The NASA Medal for Exceptional Scientific Achievement for constructing, with Dr. Roy Spencer, the first global atmospheric temperature dataset from polar orbiting satellites. He served as Lead Author of the 3rd IPCC Assessment Report (2001), he has coauthored National Academy of Science expert reports on Climate Observations (1995) and Surface Temperature Reconstructions (2006), and he has served on the NOAA Climate Change Science Program, NASA's Earth Science Subcommittee, the National Research Council Space Studies Board and the EPA Science Advisory Board. In addition, Dr. Christy has given testimony in 20 Congressional Hearings.

Judith Curry, Ph.D. is Professor Emerita at the Georgia Institute of Technology, where she served as Chair of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences for 13 years. She is President and co-founder of Climate Forecast Applications Network (CFAN). Curry has a PhD in Geophysical Sciences from the University of Chicago. She has authored or coauthored 192 peer-reviewed papers in atmospheric and climate sciences, two textbooks, and most recently the book *Climate Uncertainty and Risk*. Curry is a Fellow of the American Meteorological Society, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Geophysical Union, and a Member of the American Academy of Sciences and Letters.

The Honorable Steven E. Koonin, Ph.D. is the Edward Teller Senior Fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution. He has served as Under Secretary for Science at the Department of Energy (2009-2011), as Chief Scientist for British Petroleum (2004-2009), and as a professor at Caltech (1975 – 2004, the last nine years as Vice President and Provost). Koonin is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and the JASON group of government advisors, as well as a Governor of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, having served in similar capacities for the Los Alamos, Sandia, Brookhaven, and Argonne National Laboratories. Other prior roles include a University Professor at New York University, a non-resident Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and a Trustee of IDA, the Institute for Defense Analyses. Koonin has a BS in Physics from Caltech and a PhD in Theoretical Physics from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He authored the 2021 bestseller *Unsettled: What Climate Science Tells Us, What It Doesn't, and Why It Matters*, the 1985 textbook *Computational Physics*, and some 200 peer-reviewed papers in physics and astrophysics, scientific computation, energy technology and policy, and climate science.

Ross McKittrick, Ph.D., is a Professor of Environmental Economics at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada. He holds a BA in economics from Queen's University, and an MA and Ph.D. in economics from the University of British Columbia. He has published widely in both economics and physical science journals on topics related to climate change, pollution and public policy. His book *Economic Analysis of Environmental Policy* was published by the University of Toronto Press in 2010. His background in applied statistics has led him to author or coauthor peer-reviewed publications across a wide range of topics in the physical sciences including paleoclimate reconstruction, malaria transmission, surface temperature measurement, climate attribution methodology and climate model evaluation. Professor McKittrick has made many invited academic presentations around the world, and has testified before the US Congress and committees of the Canadian House of Commons and Senate.

Roy W. Spencer, Ph.D., is a Principal Research Scientist at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. He holds a BS in Atmospheric and Oceanic Science from the University of Michigan, and MS and PhD in Meteorology from the University of Wisconsin -Madison. Spencer's published research has focused on monitoring of weather processes and climate change from Earth-orbiting satellites, as well as using simple physical models for diagnosing climate sensitivity and climate feedbacks. As a NASA Senior Scientist for Climate Studies he served as the U.S. Science Team Leader for the Advanced Microwave Scanning Radiometer (AMSR-E) flying on the Aqua satellite, providing our most accurate global measurements of sea surface temperatures, sea ice, and several other features of the climate system. Along with Dr. John Christy, Spencer developed the first satellite-based technique for global temperature monitoring, for which they received NASA's Exceptional Scientific Achievement Medal and the American Meteorological Society's Special Award.



Impacts of Carbon Dioxide Emissions on the U.S. Climate

Climate Working Group
United States Department of Energy
May 27, 2025

Impacts of Carbon Dioxide Emissions on the U.S. Climate

Report to U.S. Energy Secretary Christopher Wright

May 27, 2025

Climate Working Group:

John Christy, Ph.D.

Judith Curry, Ph.D.

Steven Koonin, Ph.D.

Ross McKittrick, Ph.D.

Roy Spencer, Ph.D.

Copyright © 2025 United States

Suggested citation:

Climate Working Group (2025) Impacts of Carbon Dioxide Emissions on the U.S. Climate. Washington DC: Department of Energy, May 27, 2025.

OUO – Official Use Only

Table of Contents

[TOC \O "1-3" \H \Z \U]

SECRETARY'S FOREWORD

Energy, Integrity, and the Power of Human Potential

Over my lifetime, I've had the privilege of working as an energy entrepreneur across a range of fields—nuclear, geothermal, natural gas, and more—and I now serve as Secretary of Energy under President Donald Trump. But above all, I'm a physical scientist who sees modern energy as nothing short of miraculous. It powers every aspect of modern life, drives every industry, and has made America an energy powerhouse with the ability to fuel global progress.

The rise of human flourishing over the past two centuries is a story worth celebrating. Yet we are told—relentlessly—that the very energy systems that enabled this progress now pose an existential threat. Hydrocarbon-based fuels, the argument goes, must be rapidly abandoned or else we risk planetary ruin.

That view demands scrutiny. That's why I commissioned this report: to encourage a more thoughtful and science-based conversation about climate change and energy. With my technical background, I've reviewed reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the U.S. government's assessments, and the academic literature. I've also engaged with many climate scientists, including the authors of this report.

What I've found is that media coverage often distorts the science. Many people—even well-meaning ones—walk away with a view of climate change that is exaggerated or incomplete. To provide clarity, I asked a diverse team of independent experts to summarize the current state of climate science, with a focus on how it relates to the United States.

I didn't select these authors because we always agree—far from it. In fact, they may not always agree with each other. But I chose them for their rigor, honesty, and willingness to elevate the debate. I exerted no control over their conclusions. What you'll read are their words, drawn from the best available data and scientific assessments.

I've reviewed the report carefully and challenged its findings. I believe it faithfully represents the state of climate science today. Still, many readers may be surprised by its conclusions—which differ in important ways from the mainstream narrative. That's a sign of how far the public conversation has drifted from the science itself.

To correct course, we need open, respectful, and informed debate. That's why I'm inviting public comment on this report. Honest scrutiny and scientific transparency should be at the heart of our policymaking.

Climate change is real, and it deserves attention. But it is not the greatest threat facing humanity. That distinction belongs to global energy poverty. As someone who values data, I know that improving the human condition depends on expanding access to reliable, affordable energy. Climate change is a challenge—not a catastrophe. But misguided policies based on fear rather than facts could truly endanger human well-being.

We stand at the threshold of a new era of energy leadership. If we empower innovation rather than restrain it, America can lead the world in providing cleaner, more abundant energy—lifting billions out of poverty, strengthening our economy, and improving our environment along the way.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reviews scientific certainties and uncertainties in how anthropogenic carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions have affected, or will affect, the Nation's climate, extreme weather events, and selected metrics of societal well-being. Those emissions are increasing the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere through a complex and variable carbon cycle, where some portion of the additional CO₂ persists in the atmosphere for centuries.

Elevated concentrations of CO₂ enhance plant growth, globally “greening” the planet and increasing agricultural productivity. They also make the oceans less alkaline (lower the pH) by an amount within the range of natural variability. That is possibly detrimental to coral reefs, although the recent rebound of the Great Barrier Reef suggests otherwise.

Carbon dioxide also acts as a greenhouse gas, exerting a warming influence on climate and weather. Scenarios of future CO₂ emissions have tended to overestimate observed levels.

The world's several dozen detailed climate models offer little guidance on how the climate responds to elevated CO₂, with the average surface warming under a doubling of the CO₂ concentration ranging from 1.8°C to 5.7°C, a larger range than simpler, data driven estimates, which suggest a response in the range 1.8°C to 2.7°C.

Detailed climate models generally run “hot” in their description of the climate of the past few decades - too much warming at the surface and, in the lower- and mid-troposphere too much amplification of warming aloft. They also produce too much stratospheric cooling, too much snow loss, and too much warming in the Corn Belt. The combination of overly sensitive models and extreme scenarios for future emissions has exaggerated projections of future warming.

Most extreme weather events do not show long-term trends. Claims of increased frequency or intensity of hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and droughts are not supported by historical data. Additionally, forest management practices are often overlooked in assessing wildfire activity. Global sea level has risen approximately 8 inches since 1900, but there are significant regional variations in tide gauge data driven primarily by local land subsidence; U.S. tide gauge measurements in aggregate show no obvious acceleration in sea level rise beyond the historical average rate.

The attribution of particular climate changes or extreme weather events to human CO₂ emissions is challenged by natural climate variability, data limitations, and inherent model deficiencies. Moreover, solar activity's contribution to the warming climate might be underestimated.

Both models and experience suggest that CO₂-induced warming might be less damaging economically than commonly believed, and excessively aggressive mitigation policies could prove more detrimental than beneficial. Social Cost of Carbon estimates, which attempt to quantify the economic damage of CO₂ emissions, are highly sensitive to their underlying assumptions and so provide limited independent information.

The report supports a more nuanced and evidence-based approach to climate policy. The risks and benefits of a climate changing under both natural and human influences must be weighed against the costs, efficacy, and collateral impacts of any “climate action”, considering the nation's need for reliable and affordable energy with minimal local pollution. Beyond continuing precise, un-interrupted observations of the global climate system, it will be important to make realistic assumptions about future emissions, re-evaluate climate models to address biases and uncertainties, and clearly acknowledge the limitations of event attribution studies. An approach that acknowledges both the potential risks and benefits of CO₂, rather than relying on flawed models and extreme scenarios, is essential for informed and effective decision-making.

PREFACE

This document originated in late March 2025 when Secretary Wright assembled an independent group to write a report on issues in climate science relevant for energy policymaking, with particular focus on the question of whether carbon dioxide emissions endanger the U.S. public. We agreed to undertake the work on the condition that there would be no editorial oversight by the Secretary, the Department of Energy, or any other government personnel. This condition has been honored throughout the process and the writing team has worked with full independence.

The group began working in early April with a deadline of May 28. The short timeline and the technical nature of the material meant that we could not comprehensively review all topics. While the report is intended to be accessible to non-experts, we have omitted some introductory or explanatory material that can easily be accessed elsewhere. Nor have we attempted to survey entire literatures related to the topics covered. We have focused as much as possible on literature published since 2020 and referenced previous IPCC and NCA assessment reports. We have also used data through 2024 where possible.

The writing team is grateful to Secretary Wright for the opportunity to prepare this report and for his support of independent scientific assessment and open scientific debate.

John Christy, Ph.D.

Judith Curry, Ph.D.

Steven Koonin, Ph.D.

Ross McKittrick, Ph.D.

Roy Spencer, Ph.D.

PART I: DIRECT HUMAN INFLUENCE ON ECOSYSTEMS AND THE CLIMATE

1 CARBON DIOXIDE AS A POLLUTANT

Chapter summary:

Carbon dioxide (CO₂) differs in many ways from the so-called Criteria Air Pollutants. It does not affect local air quality and has no human toxicological implications at ambient levels. It is an issue of concern because of its potential effects on the global climate, a complex issue that occupies much of this report.

The Clean Air Act of 1970 defined six so-called Criteria Air Contaminants subject to regulation (EPA): particulate matter, ground-level ozone, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, lead, and carbon monoxide. In 2007, the Supreme Court ruled that greenhouse gases (CO₂ among them) were also “pollutants” subject to regulation under Clean Air Act (*Mass. v. EPA*, 2007). While the definition of “pollutant” is ultimately a legal one, there are important scientific distinctions between CO₂ and the Criteria Air Contaminants. The latter are subject to regulatory control because they cause local problems depending on concentrations that include nuisances (odor, visibility), damage to plants, and, at high enough exposure levels, toxicological effects in humans. In contrast, CO₂ is odorless, does not affect visibility and has no toxicological effects at ambient levels. It is a naturally occurring part of the atmosphere and a key component of human and plant respiration. CO₂ is essential for plant photosynthesis and higher levels are beneficial for vegetation. In these aspects, CO₂ is similar to water vapor.

Ambient outdoor air today contains about 430 parts per million (ppm) CO₂, increasing at about 2 ppm per year. The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration issues guidelines for indoor workplaces in which elevated CO₂ might be encountered, such as where dry ice is used. The Permissible Exposure Limit is 5,000 ppm over 8 hours (OSHA, 2024). Allen *et al.* (2015) reported evidence of diminished performance on some cognitive tasks among workers in office cubicles when exposed to CO₂ levels above 1,000-1,500 ppm. These levels are far larger than any plausible ambient outdoor value through the end of the 22nd century.

The growing amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere directly influences the earth system by promoting plant growth (global greening), thereby enhancing agricultural yields, and by neutralizing ocean alkalinity. But the primary concern about CO₂ is its role as a greenhouse gas (GHG) that alters the earth’s energy balance. How the climate will respond to that influence is a complex question that will occupy much of this report.

References

- Massachusetts v. Environmental Protection Agency, 549 U.S. 497 (2007). [[HYPERLINK "https://www.oyez.org/cases/2006/05-1120"](https://www.oyez.org/cases/2006/05-1120)]
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (n.d.). Criteria air pollutants. [[HYPERLINK "https://www.epa.gov/criteria-air-pollutants"](https://www.epa.gov/criteria-air-pollutants)]
- U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. (2024). OSHA occupational chemical database: Carbon dioxide. [[HYPERLINK "https://www.osha.gov/chemicaldata/183"](https://www.osha.gov/chemicaldata/183)]

2 DIRECT IMPACTS OF CO₂ ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Chapter summary:

CO₂ enhances photosynthesis and improves plant water use efficiency, thereby promoting plant growth. Global greening due to increased CO₂ levels in the atmosphere is well-established on all continents.

CO₂ absorption in sea water makes the oceans less alkaline. The recent decline in pH is within the range of natural variability on millennial time scales. Most ocean life evolved when the oceans were mildly acidic. Decreasing pH might adversely affect corals, although the Australian Great Barrier Reef has shown considerable growth in recent years.

2.1 CO₂ and global greening

The growing CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere has the important positive effect of promoting plant growth by enhancing photosynthesis and improving water use efficiency. That is evident in the “global greening” phenomenon discussed below, as well as in the improving agricultural yields discussed in Chapter 10.

2.1.1 Measurement of global greening

“Greening” refers to an increase in the fraction of the Earth’s surface covered by plants. It can be quantified by the “Leaf Area Index” (LAI) measured by satellite. Many studies over the past decade have confirmed a global greening pattern (increase in LAI) attributable to rising CO₂ levels. Zhu *et al.* (2016) was one of the first studies to report that global greening was detectable using satellite sensors. From 1982 to 2011 they detected greening over 25-50 percent of the Earth versus “browning” over only 4 percent and attributed 70 percent of the greening to rising CO₂ levels (see Figure 2.1).

Zheng (2017) confirmed the pattern, noting that greening over thirty years had added 8 percent to global leaf area and that greening was mitigating warming. Greening has been observed globally but Chen *et al.* (2019) noted that China and India were exploiting it through land management changes. Thus, while China accounts for only 6.6 percent of global vegetated area it accounts for 25 percent of global net increase in LAI. Piao *et al.* (2020) noted that greening was even observable in the Arctic.

While plant models predict increased photosynthesis in response to rising CO₂, Haverd *et al.* (2020) reported a CO₂ fertilization rate nearly double model predictions. That is, CO₂ fertilization had driven an increase in observed global photosynthesis by 30 percent since 1900, versus 17 percent predicted by plant models. This indicates that global models of the socioeconomic impacts of rising CO₂ have likely understated the benefits to crops and agriculture. The connection between CO₂ fertilization and climate policy will be discussed in Chapter 10.

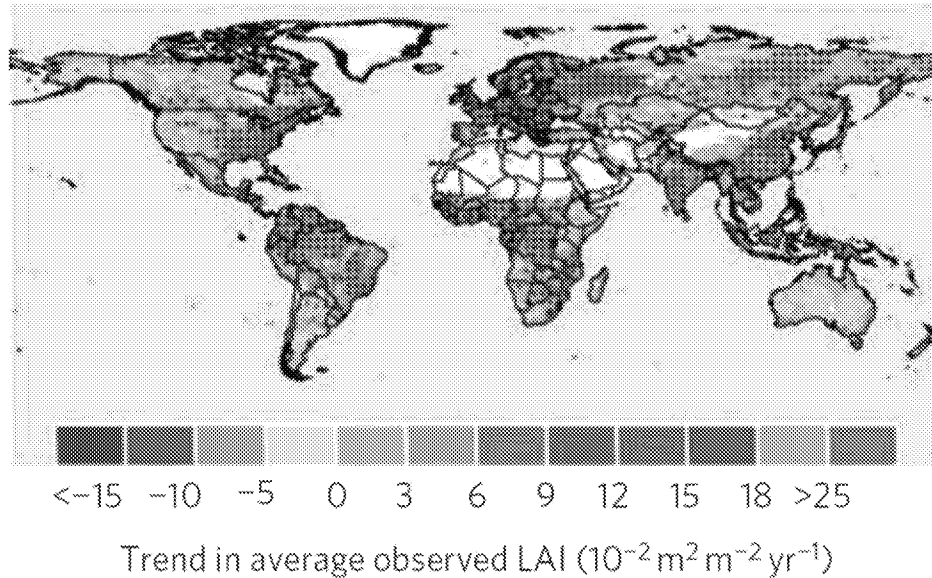


Figure 2.1: Trends in average Leaf Area Index (LAI). Source: Zhu *et al.* 2016 Figure 3.

Finally, Chen *et al.* (2024) surveyed claims that greening had slowed since 2000 due to drought stress. They found instead that faulty satellite sensors were the cause and that the corrected data showed accelerated greening over 55 percent of the globe while browning was accelerating over only 7%. In other words, the greening trend continued with no evidence of slowdown, and CO_2 fertilization remained the dominant driver

2.1.2 Photosynthesis and CO_2 levels

Plants build biomass through *photosynthesis*, a process that converts carbon dioxide, water, and light into sugar. The plant enzyme responsible for photosynthesis is Ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate-carboxylase/oxygenase or “Rubisco”. Photosynthesis is initiated when CO_2 is available at the surface of the Rubisco enzyme where it is converted to a molecule with 3 carbon atoms and thereafter incorporated into plant mass. This is referred to as the “C3” process.

Rubisco is estimated to have evolved about 3 billion years ago. Over geological time the Earth’s atmospheric CO_2 levels were usually many times higher than they are today, as shown in Figure 2.2.

About 400 million years ago CO_2 levels were an estimated 2,000-4,000 ppm and were at or above 1,000 ppm for much of the interval from 200 to 50 million years ago (Berner 2006, Judd *et al.* 2024). Over the past 35 million years the level of atmospheric CO_2 has been steadily declining, falling to as low as 170 ppm during glaciations (Gerhart and Ward 2010).

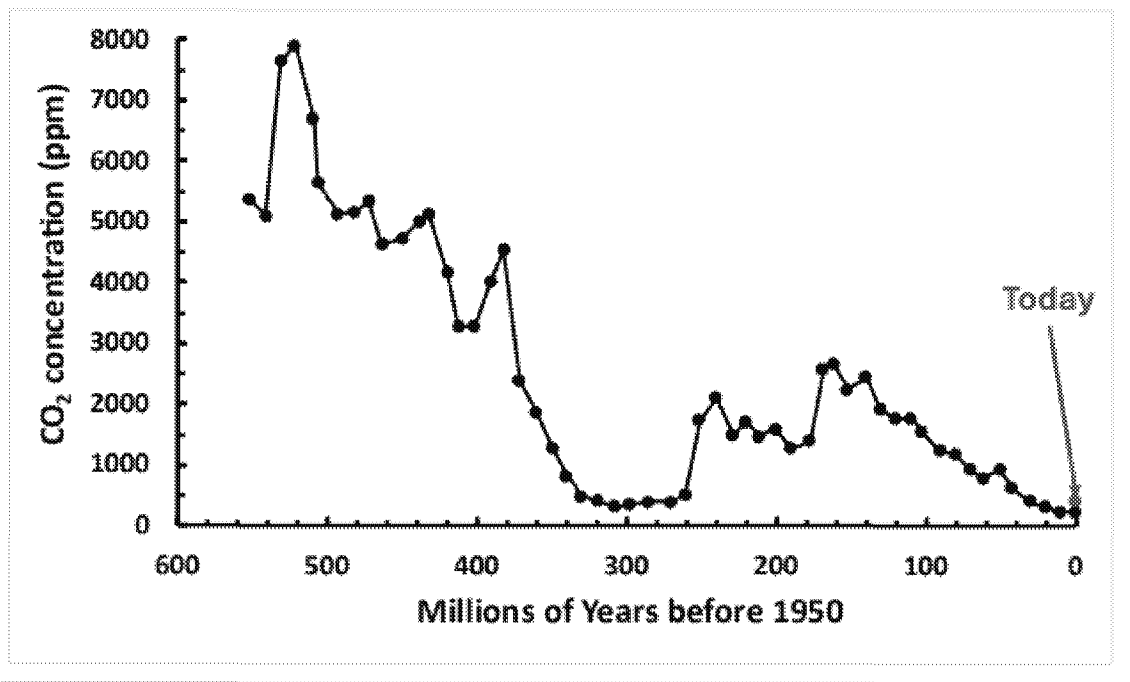


Figure 2.2. Ambient CO₂ levels over the past 550 million years. Today's concentration of 430 ppm is also shown. Source: (Berner 2006)

In response to low-CO₂ conditions some plants evolved another photosynthetic pathway called C₄, in which CO₂ is concentrated in the vicinity of Rubisco, allowing for the C₃ process to function more efficiently. For agricultural purposes the plant categories are:

- C₃: rice, wheat, soybeans and most other crops
- C₄: maize (corn), sugar cane, millet, sorghum

Had atmospheric CO₂ levels continued declining, plant growth would have declined and eventually ceased. Below 180 ppm, the growth rates of many C₃ species are reduced 40-60 percent relative to 350 ppm (Gerhart and Ward 2010) and growth has stopped altogether under experimental conditions of 60—140 ppm CO₂. Some C₄ plants are still able to grow at levels even as low as 10 ppm, albeit very slowly (Gerhart and Ward 2010).

Current CO₂ levels are about 430 ppm, up from 280 ppm in the early 1800s. The positive response of plants to extra CO₂ is illustrated in Figure 2.3, reproduced from Gerhart and Ward (2010). It shows the growth effect of CO₂ on Velvetleaf (*Abutilon theophrasti*) seedlings over 14 days under controlled conditions where only the CO₂ exposure is varied. The gains induced by increasing CO₂ from 150 ppm to 350 ppm continue under a further doubling to 700 ppm.

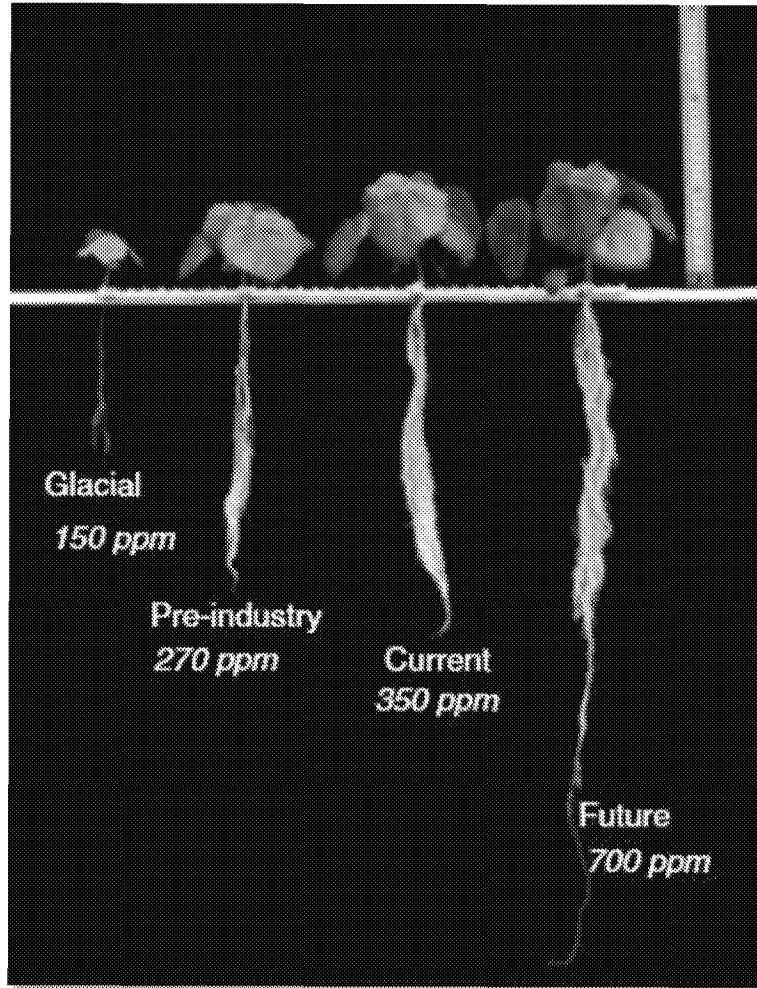


Figure 2.3: growth of *Abutilon theophrasti* after 14 days under identical conditions but for the indicated variations in CO₂ levels. Source: Gerhart and Ward (2010). Note “Current” corresponds to 1988 in image.

Over the past 60+ years there have been thousands of studies on the response of plants to rising CO₂ levels. The overwhelming theme is that plants, especially C3 plants, benefit from extra CO₂. There are two mechanisms by which CO₂ confers a growth benefit:

- Enhanced photosynthesis via the metabolic pathways described above.
- Increased water use efficiency. This arises because plants draw in CO₂ by opening the stomata (pores) on the leaf surface. When CO₂ is scarce the stomata must be kept wide open for long periods, allowing water to evaporate. Under enriched CO₂ conditions the stomata remain closed for longer periods, thus helping the plant retain water longer, and so increasing water use efficiency.

Specific effects of climate change on U.S. agriculture will be reviewed in Chapter 9.

2.1.3 Rising CO₂ and crop water use efficiency

Derying *et al.* (2016) surveyed evidence on crop water productivity (CWP), the yield per unit of water used, drawing attention to the potential for CO₂ both to enhance photosynthesis and to reduce leaf-level transpiration (water loss during leaf respiration). They surveyed all available FACE data (Free Air CO₂

Enrichment—see Chapter 10) on crop yield changes for Maize (corn), Wheat, Rice, and Soybean and combined it with crop model data simulating yield responses as of 2080 under the extreme RCP8.5 emissions scenario in four growing regions (Tropics, Arid, Temperate and Cold) each of which were split into rainfed and irrigated sub-regions. They reported that models without CO₂ fertilization predicted CWP losses in every region, but those were more than offset by CO₂ fertilization so that all regions showed a net CWP gain. Deryng *et al.* (2016) also reported that negative impacts of warming on wheat and soybean yields were fully offset by CWP gains and mitigated by up to 90 percent for rice and 60 percent for maize.

Similarly, Cheng *et al.* (2017) noted that increased global plant growth from 1982 to 2011 due to rising CO₂ uptake was accompanied by such large gains in CWP that global water use by plants had not increased, despite the extra biomass.

Deryng *et al.* (2016) assumed that climate change would “exacerbate water scarcity”. Yet while models do predict that drylands will expand under climate warming, current data show the opposite: greening is happening even in arid areas. Zhang *et al.* (2024) report that due to increased CO₂ levels “increasing aridity in drylands won’t lead to a general loss of vegetation productivity”; at most only 4 percent of currently arid areas will see increased desertification.

2.1.4 CO₂ fertilization benefits in IPCC Reports

The IPCC has only minimally discussed global greening and CO₂ fertilization of agricultural crops. The topic is briefly acknowledged in a few places in the body of the IPCC 6th and earlier Assessment Reports but is omitted in all Summary documents. Section 2.3.4.3.3 of the AR6 Working Group I report, entitled “global greening and browning,” points out that the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land had concluded with *high confidence* that greening had increased globally over the past 2-3 decades. It then discusses that there are variations in the greening trend among data sets, concluding that while they have *high confidence* greening has occurred, they have *low confidence* in the magnitude of the trend. There are also brief mentions of CO₂ fertilization effects and improvements in water use efficiency in a few other chapters in the AR6 Working Groups I and II Reports.

Overall, however, the Policymaker Summaries, Technical Summaries, and Synthesis Reports do not discuss the topic.

2.2 The Alkaline Oceans

2.2.1 Changing pH

A neutral aqueous solution has a pH of 7.0, while one with pH greater than 7.0 is alkaline (also termed basic) and with pH less than 7.0 is acidic. The modern-day global average pH of sea water is estimated to be 8.04 (Copernicus Marine Service 2025), down from an estimated value of 8.2 in pre-Industrial times (Gattuso and Hansson, 2011). As CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere increase, the oceans absorbed more, which decreases their pH. Depending upon the oceans’ buffering capacity, they are expected to become somewhat less alkaline over time, consistent with the observed decrease in pH.

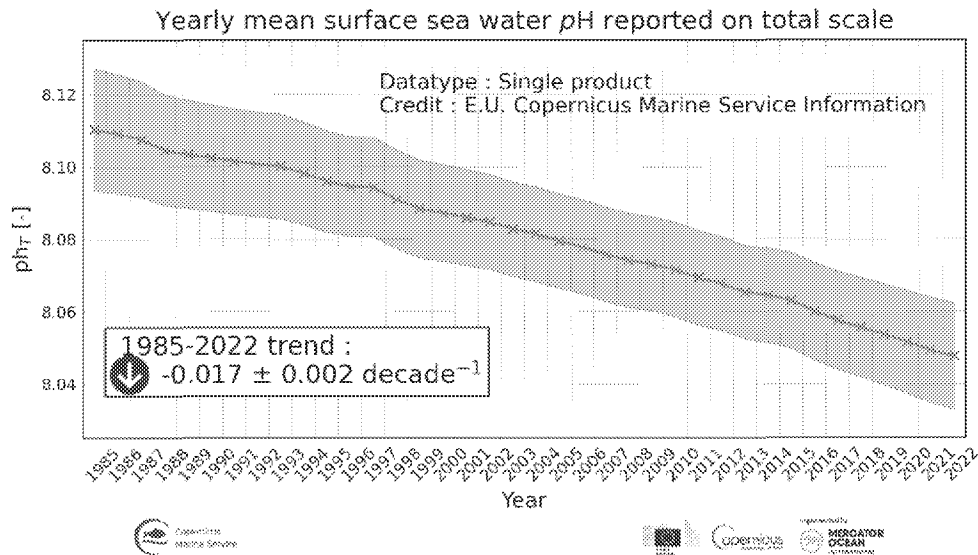


Figure 2.4: Ocean pH 1985 – 2022. Source: Copernicus Marine Service 2025

While this process is often called “ocean acidification”, it is a misnomer because the oceans are not expected to become acidic; “ocean neutralization” would be more accurate. Even if the water were to turn acidic, it is believed that life in the oceans evolved when the oceans were mildly acidic with pH 6.5 - to 7.0 (Krissansen-Totton *et al.*, 2018). On the time scale of thousands of years, boron isotope proxy measurements show that ocean pH was around 7.4 or 7.5 during the last glaciation (up to about 20,000 years ago) increasing to present-day values as the world warmed during deglaciation (Rae *et al.*, 2018). Thus, ocean biota appear to be resilient to natural long-term changes in ocean pH since marine organisms were exposed to wide ranges in pH.

2.2.2 Coral reef changes

There are concerns that a decreasing pH of sea water will reduce the calcification rate of coral reefs. But coral reefs already endure large swings in pH, partly due to daily photosynthetic activity in the reef; measured pH values range from 9.4 during the day to 7.5 at night (Revelle and Fairbridge, 1957). De'ath *et al.* (2009) reported that a portion of Australia's Great Barrier Reef (GBR, the world's largest coral reef ecosystem) had experienced a 14 percent decline in calcification since 1990. This was tentatively attributed to increasing water temperature and decreasing pH. But Ridd *et al.* (2013) showed that report to have resulted from a biased data analysis that, when corrected, showed no change in calcification rates. Nevertheless, the alarm produced by the original paper has persisted as evidenced by the large number of published citations (541) to the original study compared to only 11 citations to the correction (as of 30 April 2025).

The most recent annual summary of GBR conditions from the Australian Institute of Marine Science indicates that coral production has rebounded strongly (AIMS, 2023). Figure 2.5 shows the results of the AIMS surveys of hard coral cover, expressed as a percentage of the reef area. Much of the decline in the GBR before 2011 turned out to be due to intense tropical cyclone activity (Beeden *et al.*, 2015) as well as a string of marine heatwaves, agricultural runoff and invasive species (Woods Hole, 2023). Given the reported declines in GBR calcification between 1990 and 2009 and the continued increase in atmospheric CO₂ levels the rebound has surprised some observers.

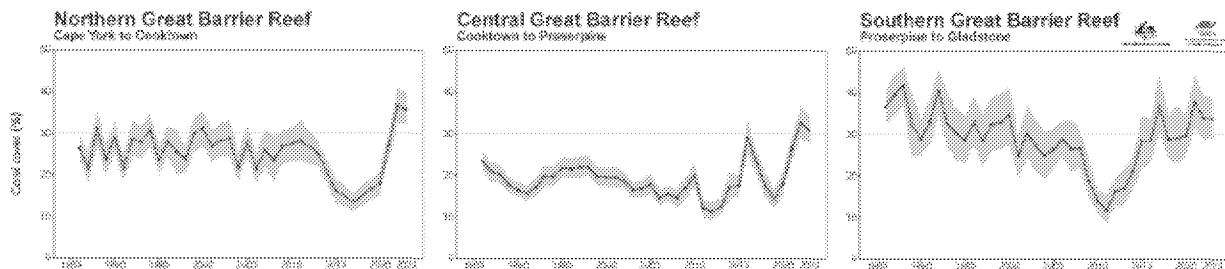


Figure 2.5 Hard coral cover of three regions of the Great Barrier Reef 1985 to 2023. Source: AIMS 2023.

It is being increasingly recognized that publication bias (alarming ocean acidification results preferred by high-impact research publications) exaggerates the reported impacts of declining ocean pH. An ICES Journal of Marine Science Special Issue addressed this problem with an article entitled, *Towards a Broader Perspective on Ocean Acidification Research*. In the Introduction to that Special Issue, H. I. Browman stated, “As is true across all of science, studies that report no effect of ocean acidification are typically more difficult to publish.” (Browman, 2016).

Similarly, a meta-analysis (Clements *et al.*, 2021) of the negative effects of ocean acidification on reef fish behavior found what they called a “decline effect”: initially dramatic conclusions published in prominent journals showing apparently large impacts of acidification tended to be followed up by subsequent studies on larger sample sizes yielding much smaller and typically non-existent effects. They call for their colleagues to improve research practices to counter the “decline effect”:

[The] vast majority of studies with large effect sizes in this field tend to be characterized by low sample sizes, yet are published in high-impact journals and have a disproportionate influence on the field in terms of citations. We contend that ocean acidification has a negligible direct impact on fish behavior, and we advocate for improved approaches to minimize the potential for a decline effect in future avenues of research (Clements *et al.*, 2021).

In summary, ocean life is complex and much of it evolved when the oceans were acidic relative to the present. The ancestors of modern coral first appeared about 245 million ago; as can be seen from Figure 2.2, CO₂ levels for more than 200 million years afterward were many times higher than they are today. Much of the public discussion of the effects of ocean “acidification” on marine biota has been one-sided and exaggerated. There is a known tendency for studies reporting dramatic effects on things like coral cover and fish behavior to get published in high-impact journals and receive widespread press coverage, then subsequent research rebutting those findings receives little attention.

References

- AR6: *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report* (2021) Working Group I Contribution. [[HYPERLINK "http://www.ipcc.ch"](http://www.ipcc.ch)].
- Australian Institute of Marine Science. (2022). Continued coral recovery leads to 36-year highs across two-thirds of the Great Barrier Reef. [[HYPERLINK "https://www.aims.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/AIMS_LTMP_Report_on%20GBR_coral_status_2021_2022_040822F3.pdf"](https://www.aims.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/AIMS_LTMP_Report_on%20GBR_coral_status_2021_2022_040822F3.pdf)]

- Beeden, R., Maynard, J., Puotinen, M., Marshall, P., Dryden, J., Goldberg, J., and Williams, G. (2015). Impacts and recovery from Severe Tropical Cyclone Yasi on the Great Barrier Reef. *PLOS ONE*, 10, e0121272. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0121272>"]
- Berner, R. A. (2006). GEOCARBSULF: A combined model for Phanerozoic atmospheric O₂ and CO₂. *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta*, 70, 5653–5664.
- Browman, H. I. (2016). Applying organized scepticism to ocean acidification research. *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, 73(3), 529.1–536. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsw010>"]
- Chen, C., Park, T., Wang, X., Piao, S., Xu, B., Chaturvedi, R. K., and Myneni, R. B. (2019). China and India lead in greening of the world through land-use management. *Nature Sustainability*, 2, 122–129. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-019-0220-7>"]
- Chen, X., Wang, Y., Liu, Y., and Piao, S. (2024). The global greening continues despite increased drought stress since 2000. *Global Ecology and Conservation*, 49, e02791. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2351989423004262>"]
- Cheng, L., Zhang, L., Wang, Y. P., *et al.* (2017). Recent increases in terrestrial carbon uptake at little cost to the water cycle. *Nature Communications*, 8, 110. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-017-00114-5>"]
- Clements, J. C., Sundin, J., Clark, T. D., and Jutfelt, F. (2022). Meta-analysis reveals an extreme “decline effect” in the impacts of ocean acidification on fish behavior. *PLOS Biology*, 20(2), e3001511. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3001511>"]
- Copernicus Marine Service. (2025). Global ocean acidification – Mean sea water pH time series and trend from multi-observations reprocessing. [HYPERLINK "https://data.marine.copernicus.eu/product/GLOBAL_OMI_HEALTH_carbon_ph_area_averaged/description"]
- De'ath, G., Lough, J., and Fabricius, K. (2009). Declining coral calcification on the Great Barrier Reef. *Science*, 323, 116–119. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1165283>"]
- Deryng, D., Conway, D., Ramankutty, N., Price, J., Warren, R., Jones, R., ... and Elliott, J. (2016). Regional disparities in the beneficial effects of rising CO₂ concentrations on crop water productivity. *Nature Climate Change*. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2995>"]
- Gattuso, J. P., and Hansson, L. (Eds.). (2011). *Ocean acidification: Background and history*. Oxford University Press.
- Gerhart, L. M., and Ward, J. K. (2010). Plant responses to low [CO₂] of the past. *New Phytologist*, 188, 674–695. [HYPERLINK "<https://nph.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1469-8137.2010.03441.x>"]
- Haverd, V., Raupach, M., Briggs, P., *et al.* (2020). Higher than expected CO₂ fertilization inferred from leaf to global observations. *Global Change Biology*, 26, 2390–2402.
- Judd, E. J., Scotese, C. R., Young, S. A., *et al.* (2024). A 485-million-year history of Earth's surface temperature. *Science*, 385(6715). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adk3705>"]
- Krissansen-Totton, J., Arney, G. N., and Catling, D. C. (2018). Constraining the climate and ocean pH of the early Earth with a geological carbon cycle model. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(6), 4105–4110. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1721296115>"]
- Piao, S., Wang, X., Park, T., *et al.* (2020). Characteristics, drivers and feedbacks of global greening. *Nature Reviews Earth and Environment*, 1, 14–27.
- Rae, J. W. B., Burke, A., Robinson, L. F., *et al.* (2018). CO₂ storage and release in the deep Southern Ocean on millennial to centennial timescales. *Nature*, 562, 569–573. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-018-0614-0>"]
- Revelle, R., and Fairbridge, R. W. (1957). Carbonate and carbon dioxide. In J. W. Hedgpeth (Ed.), *Treatise on marine ecology and paleoecology* (Vol. 1). *Geological Society of America*.
- Ridd, P., Silva, E., and Stieglitz, T. (2013). Have coral calcification rates slowed in the last twenty years? *Marine Geology*, 346, 392–399. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.margeo.2013.09.002>"]

- Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. (2023). Is the Great Barrier Reef making a comeback? [HYPERLINK "<https://www.whoi.edu/oceanus/feature/is-the-great-barrier-reef-making-a-comeback/>"]
- Zhang, Y., Liu, Y., Chen, X., *et al.* (2024). Less than 4% of dryland areas are projected to desertify despite increased aridity under climate change. *Nature Communications Earth and Environment*, 5. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01463-y>"]
- Zhu, Z., Piao, S., Myneni, R. B., *et al.* (2016). Greening of the Earth and its drivers. *Nature Climate Change*, 6, 791–795. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/nclimate3004>"]

3 HUMAN INFLUENCES ON THE CLIMATE

Chapter Summary:

The global climate is naturally variable on all time scales. Anthropogenic CO₂ emissions add to that variability by changing the total radiative energy balance in the atmosphere.

The IPCC has downplayed the role of the sun in climate change but there are plausible solar irradiance reconstructions that imply it contributed to recent warming.

Climate projections are based on IPCC emission scenarios that have tended to exceed observed trends. Most academic climate impact studies in recent years are based upon the extreme RCP 8.5 scenario that is now considered implausible; its use as a business-as-usual scenario has been misleading.

Carbon cycle models connect annual emissions to growth in the atmospheric CO₂ stock. While models disagree over the rate of land and ocean CO₂ uptake, all agree that it has been increasing since 1959.

3.1 Components of radiative forcing and their history

3.1.1 Historical radiative forcing

A changing climate has been the norm throughout the Earth's 4.6-billion-year history. The Earth's temperature and weather patterns change naturally over timescales ranging from decades to millions of years. Natural variations in the surface climate originate in two ways. Internal climate fluctuations associated with circulations in the atmosphere and ocean exchange energy, water, and carbon between the atmosphere, oceans, land, and ice. External influences on the climate system include variations in the energy received from the sun and the effects of volcanic eruptions. Human activities influence climate through changing land use and land cover. Humans are also changing the composition of the atmosphere by emissions of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases and by altering the concentration of aerosol particles in the atmosphere.

The earth is warmed by the sunlight it absorbs and is cooled by the heat it radiates to space. Averaged over the Earth's surface, each of these processes involve power flows of about 240 Watts per square meter (W/m²). When they are in balance, there are no net external causes of warming or cooling. Both human and natural influences on the climate alter this balance and so cause the climate to change.

Influences on the Earth's energy balance at the top of the atmosphere are quantified by "radiative forcing", the extent to which they disturb the warming/cooling balance; a positive forcing warms while a negative forcing cools. The IPCC's estimated history of major components of radiative forcing since 1750 is shown in the following two figures from its AR6.

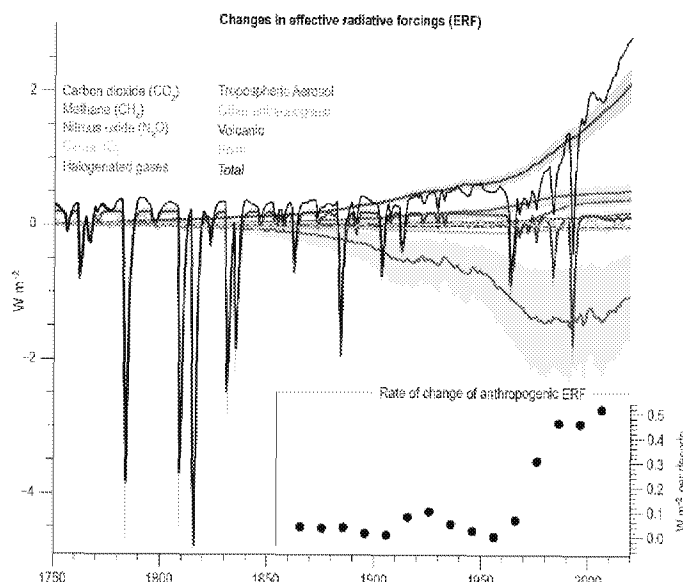


Figure 3.1.1: IPCC estimates of radiative forcing components over time. Shading indicates uncertainty ranges. Source: AR6 WGI Ch2 Fig. 10

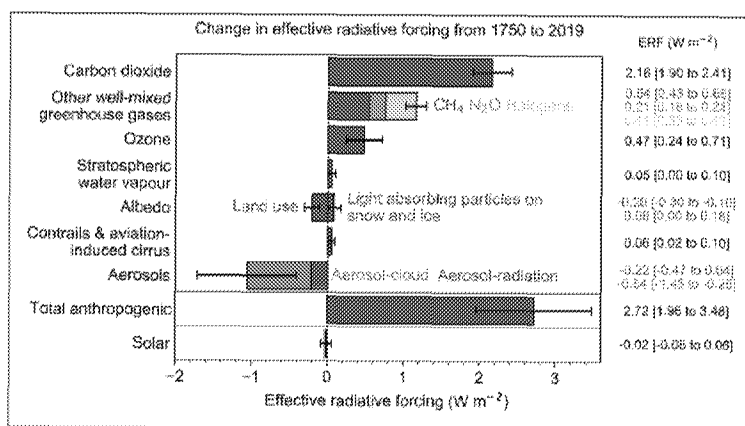


Figure 3.1.2 IPCC estimates of radiative forcing component changes from 1750 to 2019. Source: AR6 WGI Ch 7 Fig. 7-6.

These graphs show that the total radiative forcing is comprised of both natural and anthropogenic components. Carbon dioxide is the largest human influence on the climate and the one most relevant to the influence of fossil fuel use. It exerts a warming influence by decreasing the cooling power of the atmosphere. Emissions of CO₂ are accumulating in the atmosphere, as described in the following section, so that the warming influence is growing. Other greenhouse gases (methane, nitrous oxide, halogens, and ozone) act similarly, currently adding another 75 percent to CO₂'s warming. Aerosols exert a cooling effect, although with large uncertainties in the way they catalyze the formation of reflective clouds. As a result, understanding the causes of recent warming requires not just identifying the warming effects of CO₂, but also the more uncertain cooling effects of aerosols.

The IPCC assesses the change in the radiative forcing by the sun to be negligible, based on their preference for data reconstructions that imply minimal solar change since preindustrial times. But Connolly *et al.* (2021) reviewed sixteen different Total Solar Irradiance (TSI) reconstructions in the literature

covering the years 1600-2000; the reconstructions vary from almost no change in TSI to a relatively large upward trend. Those authors note that the variation in TSI reconstructions combined with variations in surface temperature reconstructions allows for inferences consistent with either no or most 20th Century warming being attributable to the sun.

A particularly thorny issue is the gap in TSI data between 1989 and 1991 due to a delay in the launch of a monitor following the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster on January 28 1986. This delay prevented a replacement satellite from being launched in time to overlap with, and its readings to be intercalibrated with, the prior system (Zacharias 2014, Scafetta *et al.* 2019). This is called the ACRIM (Active Cavity Radiometer Irradiance Monitor) gap problem. The question of whether there is an upward trend in TSI over 1978 to 2018 hangs on how the ACRIM data gap is filled. Connolly *et al.* (2021) found that the IPCC's consensus statements on solar forcing were formulated prematurely through the suppression of dissenting scientific opinions.

Another natural radiative forcing component is volcanic aerosols, which exert an episodic cooling influence. Box 4.1 in the IPCC AR6 Report addresses the climate impact of volcanic eruptions, noting three explosive volcanic eruptions that occurred in the first half of the 19th century. This included the 1815 Tambora eruption that resulted in the 'year without summer', with multiple harvest failures across the Northern Hemisphere. There is uncertainty about the sign of the relatively small forcing due to the submarine volcano Hunga Tonga which erupted in 2022 (Jenkins *et al.* 2023, Schoeberl *et al.* 2024).

Figure 3.1.1 shows that the anthropogenic forcing component was negligible before about 1900 and has increased steadily since, rising to almost 3 W/m² today. However, this is still only about 1 percent of the unperturbed radiation flows, making it a challenge to isolate the effects of anthropogenic forcing; state-of-the-art satellite estimates of global radiative energy flows are only accurate to a few W/m².

Natural sources of global energy imbalance other than volcanoes and total solar irradiance (TSI) are not included in these graphs because they remain largely unknown.

3.1.2 Change in atmospheric CO₂ since 1958

Carbon dioxide's warming influence depends on how much "extra" CO₂ accumulates in the atmosphere- *i.e.*, its concentration above the preindustrial value of 280 ppm. The CO₂ level as recorded at the Mauna Loa observatory in Hawaii, generally used as the representative global average concentration, is available online at [[HYPERLINK "https://gml.noaa.gov/ccgg/trends/index.html"](https://gml.noaa.gov/ccgg/trends/index.html)]. The concentration was about 316 ppm at the start of the record in 1959 and is now about 430 ppm, a 36 percent increase. At the end of the last glaciation CO₂ levels had fallen to about 180 ppm. As discussed in Chapter 2, C3 plants begin dying at CO₂ levels below about 140 ppm and C4 plants at levels below 100 ppm, so if CO₂ levels had continued falling plant life would have been imperiled.

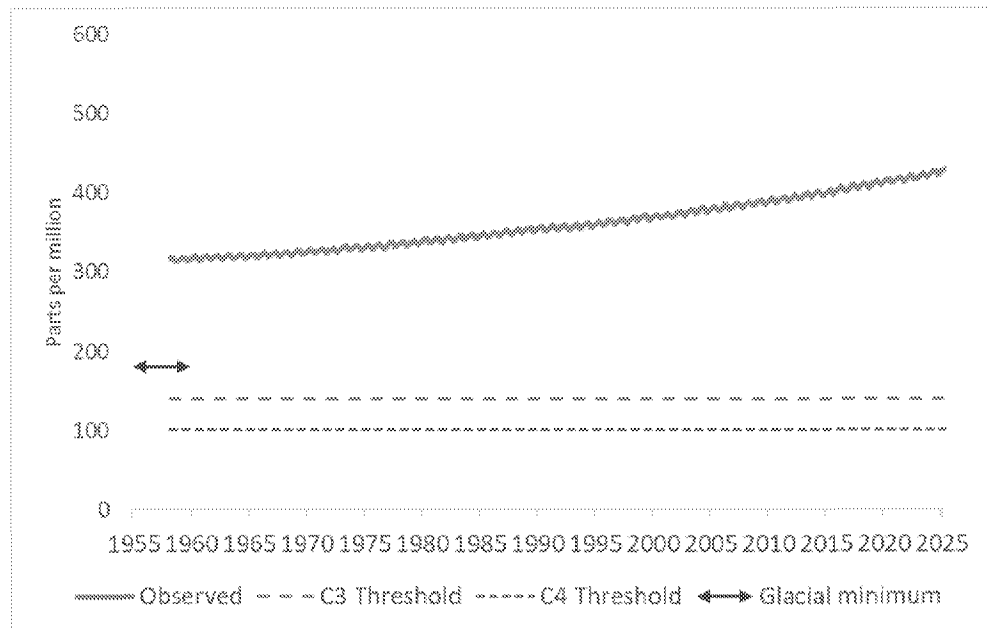


Fig. 3.1.3. CO₂: Yearly average atmospheric CO₂ concentrations (1959-2025) in ppm measured at Mauna Loa (blue). C3 Threshold: Level below which C3 plants begin dying (140 ppm, see Chapter 2). C4 Threshold: Level below which C4 plants begin dying (100 ppm, see Chapter 2). Glacial minimum: Minimum level during recent glaciations (purple arrow). CO₂ data source: [HYPERLINK "<https://gml.noaa.gov/ccgg/trends/index.html>"]

The annual increase in concentration is only about half of the CO₂ emitted because land and ocean processes currently absorb “excess” CO₂ at a rate approximately 50 percent of the human emissions. Future concentrations, and hence future human influences on the climate, therefore depend upon two components: (1) future rates of global human CO₂ emissions, and (2) how fast the land and ocean remove extra CO₂ from the atmosphere. We discuss each of these in turn.

3.2 Future emission scenarios and the carbon cycle

3.2.1 Emission scenarios

Assessing the dangers of future GHG emissions requires assumptions about what those emissions will be. Future emissions, and hence human influences on the climate, will depend upon future demographics, economic activity, regulation, and energy and agricultural technologies. Various assumptions about each of those lead to projections of greenhouse gas emissions and concentrations, aerosol concentrations, and changes in land use, which ultimately can be combined into assumptions about anthropogenic radiative forcing.

The great uncertainties about these many factors make it impossible to precisely predict future emissions. Instead, the IPCC has created various sets of scenarios meant to span a plausible range of possibilities for population, economy, and technologies. Recent versions of the scenarios are labeled by a number indicating the anthropogenic radiative forcing expected in 2100 under that scenario. Thus, a scenario labeled with a “6” corresponds to 6 W/m² of human-induced radiative forcing (warming) at the end of the century. (Recall current anthropogenic radiative forcing is about 2.7 W/m².)

Although the IPCC does not claim its emission scenarios are forecasts, they are often treated as such. Comparisons of past scenario groups against observations show that IPCC emission projections tend to overstate actual subsequent emissions. For the IPCC Third and Fourth Assessment Reports a set of emission projections from the *Special Report on Emission Scenarios* was used; these were referred to as the SREP scenarios. McKittrick *et al.* (2012) showed that, when converted to per capita values, the SREP scenario emissions distribution was skewed upwards and incompatible with observed trends. McKittrick and Wood (2013) further showed that global energy market dynamics constrained global per capita CO₂ emissions to an extent not reflected in IPCC scenarios. The bias of the SRES scenarios was confirmed by the later analysis of Hausfather *et al.* (2019) who showed that observed atmospheric CO₂ concentrations tracked the low end of the SRES range and also of subsequent IPCC scenario ranges (Figure 3.2.1).

For AR5 the IPCC developed a new set of scenarios called the Representative Concentration Pathways (RCPs). These were identified by a number representing the increase in forcing and were thus called RCP2.6, RCP4.5, RCP6.0 and RCP8.5. RCP2.6 (implying an anthropogenic radiative forcing in 2100 of 2.6 W/m²) describes a GHG concentration pathway leading to warming well below 2°C. At the other end of the scale RCP8.5 is an extreme outcome implying nearly 5°C warming from 1900 to 2100.

RCP8.5 came to be referred to as the no-policy baseline, or “business-as-usual” scenario in both the academic literature and popular media. It was therefore used to generate the reference outcome supposedly representing the 21st century world in the absence of increasingly stringent emission reduction policies. But RCP8.5 was intended as a low-probability high emissions scenario and its use as a business-as-usual baseline has been criticized as grossly misleading.¹ Hausfather and Peters (2020) writing in a commentary in *Nature* magazine, pointed out that RCP8.5 was developed as an extreme worst-case, and its misuse as a “business as usual” baseline has resulted in a large number of misleading studies and media reporting.

The implausibility of the RCP8.5 scenario was examined by Burgess *et al.* (2021). They noted that RCP8.5 has already diverged from observed trends in energy use and the near future trends diverge sharply from those of the International Energy Agency (IEA), which provides market-based projections of energy use for the coming decades. The IEA trends, which are based on plausible extrapolations of current economic and demographic trends, run below the entire envelope of RCP projections, implying not only that RCP8.5 is dubious, but that even lower emission scenarios are looking unlikely.

Widespread use of RCP8.5 has created an alarmist bias in the climate impacts literature. The extent of this problem was confirmed in a literature analysis by Pielke Jr. and Ritchie (2020). They found that some 16,800 scientific papers published between 2010 and 2020 used the RCP8.5 scenario, with about 4,500 of the articles linking RCP8.5 to the concept of “business-as-usual”. Their analysis showed how RCP8.5 was misused not only by individual researchers, but also by influential science agencies like the IPCC and the U.S. National Climate Assessment (USNCA), which has directly led to misleading coverage in prominent media outlets.

¹ This extreme scenario is useful for modelers, since a large forcing generates a large response (warming) making it easier to assess a model’s sensitivity. But that’s very different than claiming it is a plausible future outcome.

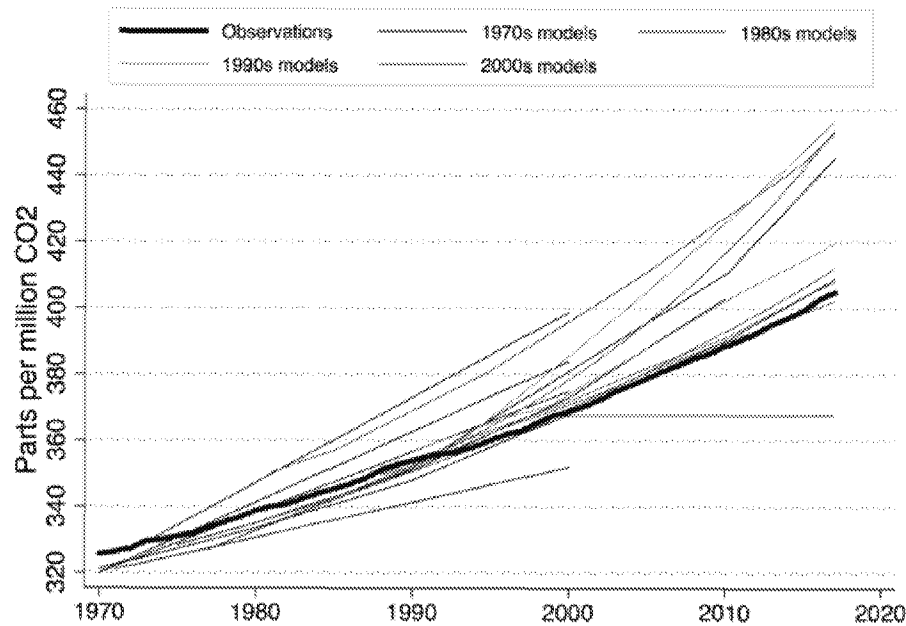


Figure 3.2.1 Comparison of observed atmospheric CO₂ levels (black line) with scenario projections (colored lines, mainly IPCC) since the 1970s. Source: Hausfather *et al.* (2019) Figure S4.

Pielke and Ritchie (2020) reported new studies using RCP8.5 were published at a rate of about 20 per day, with about two per day specifically linking RCP8.5 and “business as usual.” They conclude that the climate research community has spent a decade “committing scientific resources to science fiction” and that “The scientific literature has become imbalanced in an apocalyptic direction.”

The IPCC developed a new set of scenarios for AR6, the “Shared Socioeconomic Pathway” (SSP) scenarios, which have continued the bias shown in the RCP and SRES scenarios. Figure 3.2.2 shows total global observed CO₂ emissions compiled by the International Energy Agency (IEA) merged with the emission projection from the IEA taking account of energy use projections and current policies. The other lines show the range of IPCC SSP scenarios (SSP1-SSP5). As of 2023, global CO₂ emissions have been tracking well below SSP7.0 and are even below SSP2-4.5.

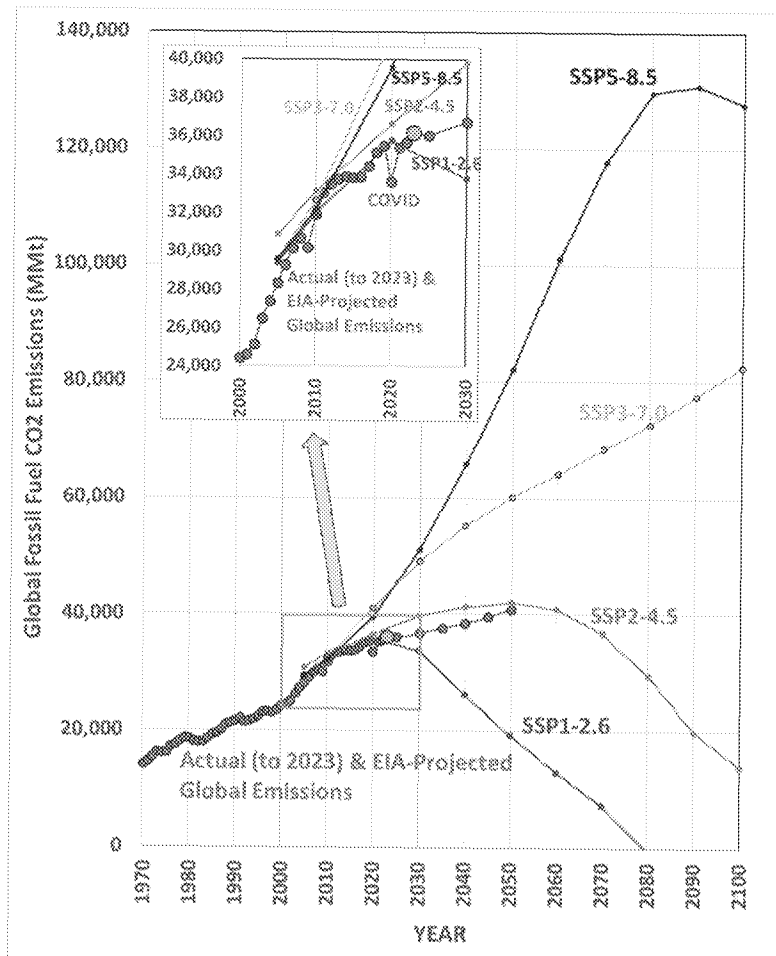


Figure 3.2.2. Observed and projected CO₂ emissions. Source: IPCC (SSP scenarios) and Energy Information Administration (EIA). Green: observed historical emissions and EIA projections. Other lines: SSP1-5. Data source: Friedlingstein *et al.* (2024).

3.2.2 The carbon cycle relating emissions and concentrations

Carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel burning (and to a lesser extent deforestation and cement production) have led to steadily increasing CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere, as shown in Fig. 3.1.3. The relation between emissions and concentration is determined by the global carbon cycle of land and ocean processes that exchange carbon with the atmosphere. Our understanding of these processes was reviewed by Crisp *et al.* (2021).

There are about 850 Gt of carbon (GtC) in the Earth's atmosphere², almost all of it in the form of CO₂. Each year, biological processes (plant growth and decay) and physical processes (ocean absorption and outgassing) exchange about 200 GtC of that carbon with the Earth's surface (roughly 80 GtC with the land and 120 GtC with the oceans). Before human activities became significant, removals from the atmosphere were roughly in balance with additions. But burning fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas) takes carbon out of the

² Because CO₂ is chemically transformed through the course of the carbon cycle, it is more convenient to track atoms of carbon rather than molecules of CO₂. One gigatonne of carbon (GtC) is equivalent to about 3.7 Gt of CO₂.

ground and adds it to the annual exchange. That addition (together with a much smaller contribution from cement manufacturing) amounted to 10.3 GtC in 2023, or only about 5 percent of the annual exchange.

The carbon cycle accommodates about 50 percent of humanity’s small annual injection of carbon into the air by naturally sequestering it through plant growth and oceanic uptake, while the remainder accumulates in the atmosphere (Ciais *et al.*, 2013). For that reason, the annual increase in atmospheric CO₂ concentration averages only about half of that naively expected from human emissions.

To project future CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere, and hence future human influences on the climate, it is important to know how the carbon cycle might change in the future. The historical near constancy of that 50 percent fraction means that the more CO₂ humanity has produced, the faster Nature removed it from the atmosphere. That 50 percent fraction changes somewhat from year to year due to natural carbon cycle imbalances from El Nino, La Nina, and varying weather patterns. There was also a substantial additional reduction in atmospheric CO₂ after the 1991 eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, a curious result that has yet to be explained (Angert *et al.*, 2004).

The main processes that remove excess CO₂ from the atmosphere are increased growth of land vegetation (especially at high latitudes), some increase in the sequestering of carbon in soils, and uptake of CO₂ by the ocean due to the increasing partial pressure of atmospheric CO₂ over that of CO₂ dissolved in the ocean. All twenty land carbon cycle models tracked by the Global Carbon Project (Friedlingstein *et al.*, 2024) show land processes have been removing excess CO₂ at an increasing rate since 1959. This is consistent with a “global greening” phenomenon (Chapter 2.1) observed by satellites since monitoring of global greenness began in 1982.

While land vegetation has been responding positively to more atmospheric CO₂, uptake of extra CO₂ by ocean biological processes remains too uncertain to be measured reliably. Our current understanding of these and many more carbon cycle processes was reviewed by Crisp *et al.* (2021).

CO₂ uptake by land processes

The uptake of extra CO₂ from the atmosphere by land surface processes (as also inferred from global greening) has been modeled with 20 different dynamic global vegetation models, the outputs of which are updated every year by the Global Carbon Project (Friedlingstein, 2024). As seen in Fig. 3.2.3, all of those models agree that vegetation and soils have been sequestering carbon from the atmosphere. But we also see that the long-term trends over 1959 to 2023 (65 years) vary widely between models, by nearly a factor of 7. This demonstrates that there remains considerable uncertainty in how fast land processes are removing CO₂ from the atmosphere, which in turn creates uncertainty in future atmospheric CO₂ concentrations, which are then an uncertainty in climate model simulations of future climate change.

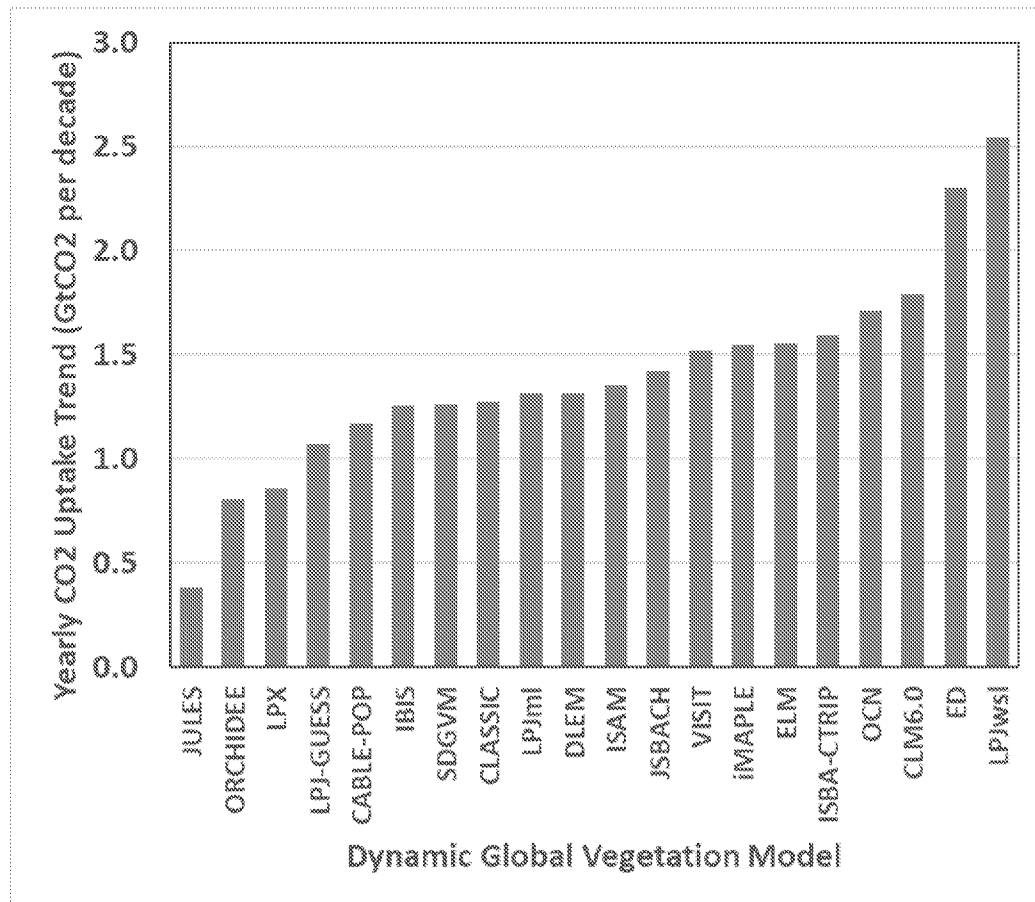


Figure 3.2.3 Trends of annual CO₂ uptake (GtCO₂ per year per decade) by land processes during 1959-2023 simulated by 20 different dynamic global vegetation models periodically reported by the Global Carbon Project (Friedlingstein, 2024).

CO₂ uptake by ocean processes

The uptake of extra CO₂ from the atmosphere by ocean processes has been modeled with 10 different ocean biogeochemistry models, the outputs of which are updated every year by the Global Carbon Project (Friedlingstein, 2024). Like the results from the land models, all of the ocean models agree that the global oceans have been sequestering carbon from the atmosphere at an increasing rate during 1959-2023 (Fig. 3.2.4). Unlike the land models, however, the ocean models show much better agreement with each other, with the model producing the fastest increasing CO₂ uptake being only 65 percent faster than the model with the most slowly increasing CO₂ uptake. In spite of the relative agreement among models, Friedlingstein *et al.* (2022) notes that there is also substantial discrepancy between the different methods on the strength of the ocean sink over the last decade, particularly in the Southern Ocean.

Note that the average trend in CO₂ uptake across all land models in Fig. 3.2.3 is 25 percent larger than the average trend in ocean uptake. This suggests land processes are increasing in their ability to remove CO₂ faster than ocean processes are increasing their CO₂ sequestration.

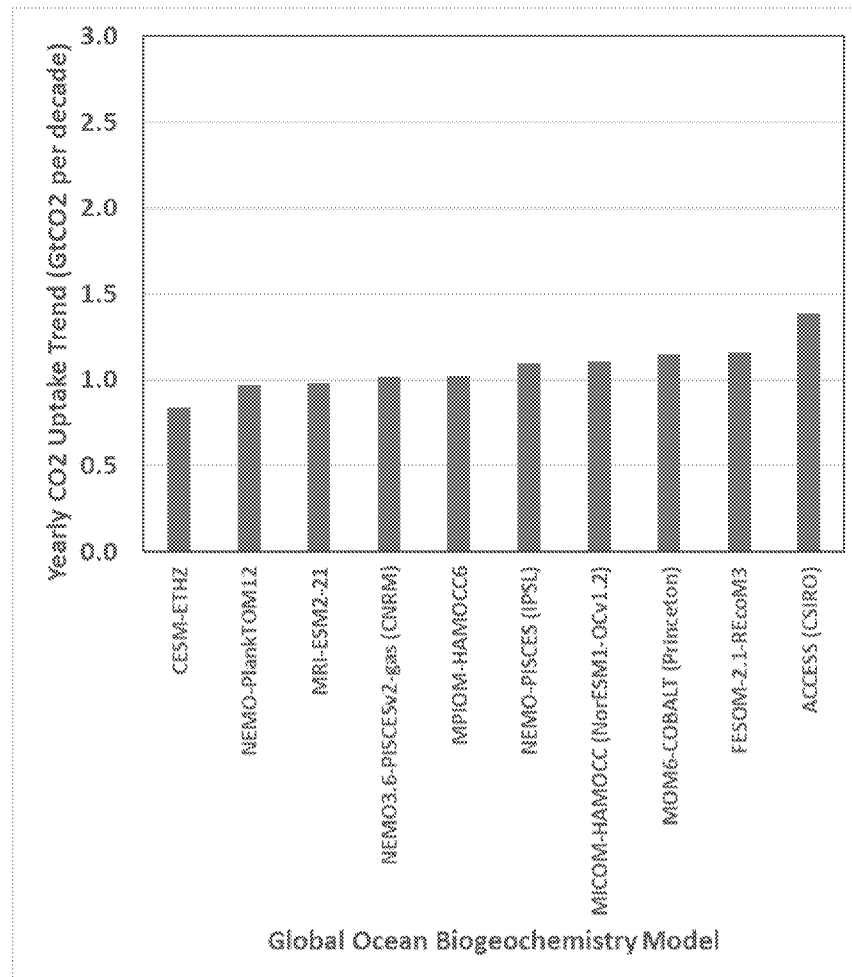


Figure 3.2.4 Trends of annual CO₂ uptake (GtCO₂ per year per decade) by ocean processes during 1959-2023 simulated by 10 different ocean biogeochemistry models periodically reported by the Global Carbon Project (Friedlingstein, 2024).

3.3 Urbanization influence on temperature trends

Historical temperature data over land has been collected mainly where people live. This raises the problem of how to filter out non-climatic warming signals due to Urban Heat Islands (UHI) and other changes to the land surface. If they are not removed the data may over-attribute observed warming to greenhouse gases. The IPCC acknowledges that raw temperature data are contaminated with UHI effects but claims to have data cleaning procedures that remove them. It is an open question whether those procedures are sufficient.

AR6 downplayed the issue by saying (WGI p. 235) that no recent evidence had emerged to alter the AR5 finding that urbanization causes an upward bias of no more than 10 percent in the global land surface warming trend. AR5 (WGI p. 189) also cited the 10 percent upper bound without citing a source. AR4 (WGI p. 244) cited Jones *et al.* (1990) and Peterson *et al.* (1999) as the basis of the claim. Peterson *et al.* had failed to find any difference in trends between rural and urban samples, although their definition of rural included local populations up to 10,000 persons while the relative influence of urbanization begins well below that (Spencer *et al.*, 2025). Jones *et al.* compared rural/urban warming in three regions: Eastern Australia, Eastern China and Western Soviet Union. Their definition of “rural” included towns of up to

10,000 in the former Soviet Union and up to 100,000 in China. They found relative warming biases greater than 10 percent in these areas but conjectured that the urbanization effect averaged over the areas they did not examine would bring the global land bias to under 10 percent of the observed warming trend.

Several papers appeared in print prior to the IPCC AR4 that argued that the warming effect of UHIs added a relatively large (30-50%) component to observed warming and was not simulated by climate models (de Laat and Maurellis 2006, McKittrick and Michaels 2007). These findings were based on correlations between locations of maximum warming over land with locations of maximum socioeconomic development. AR4 asserted (p. 244) that these correlations were an artefact of natural atmospheric circulations and were in fact statistically insignificant, and on that basis set the findings aside. Their claim was controversial because it was presented with no supporting evidence. McKittrick (2010) and McKittrick and Nierenberg (2010) showed that taking into account various conjectured alternative explanations for the correlations did not affect their significance. The AR5 (p. 189) conceded that the AR4 had provided “no explicit evidence” for its assessment and further acknowledged, based on these papers, that there was “significant evidence for such contamination of the record” i.e. a warming bias in the land record. However as already noted, elsewhere in the AR5 report they carried forward the AR4 claim that it was less than 10 percent of observed warming. Further they provided no caution about using the land record for climate measurement despite conceding the evidence for UHI contamination. Recently Soon *et al.* (2023) estimated an urbanization bias in the Northern Hemisphere land record over 1850-2018 sufficient to increase the trend in the blended record from 0.55°C to 0.89°C per century.

Some studies providing evidence against UHI contamination compared warming rates between rural and urban locations (Jones *et al.* 1990, Peterson *et al.* 1999, Wickham *et al.* 2013). It is not known whether such methods would be capable of detecting UHI bias even when present. The influence of UHI warming is logarithmic in population, in other words it is strongest at low population density then levels off as local urbanization expands (Oke 1973, Spencer *et al.* 2025). Hence failure to find a difference in warming rates between urban and rural stations does not prove the absence of UHI contamination. McKittrick (2013) provided an empirical demonstration in which the rural/urban trends were not significantly different in a data set shown on other grounds to be contaminated with UHI bias.

Parker (2006) instead examined a sample of urban locations and found no difference in trends between subsets partitioned according to nighttime wind speed, concluding on this basis that urbanization could not be a significant factor. Here again the question is whether such a method would find UHI bias even if present. McKittrick (2013) presented an example in which UHI-contaminated data did not exhibit significant trend differences when stratified according to wind speed.

The challenge in measuring UHI bias is relating local temperature change to a corresponding change in population or urbanization, rather than to a static classification variable such as rural or urban. Spencer *et al.* (2025) used newly available historical population archives to undertake such an analysis and found evidence of significant UHI bias in U.S. summertime temperature data.

In summary, while there is clearly warming in the land record, there is also evidence that it is biased upward by patterns of urbanization and that these biases have not been completely removed by the data processing algorithms used to produce climate data sets.

References

- Angert, A., S. Biraud, Bonfils, C., Buermann, W. and I. Fung (2004). CO2 seasonality indicates origins of post-Pinatubo sink. *Geophysical Research Letters* 31. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1029/2004GL019760" \t "_blank" \]](https://doi.org/10.1029/2004GL019760)
- AR6: *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report* (2021) Working Group I Contribution. [[HYPERLINK "http://www.ipcc.ch"](http://www.ipcc.ch)].

- AR5: *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report* (2021) Working Group I Contribution. [HYPERLINK "<http://www.ipcc.ch>"].
- AR4: *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report* (2021) Working Group I Contribution. [HYPERLINK "<http://www.ipcc.ch>"].
- Burgess, Matthew et al (2021) *Environmental Research Letters* 16 014016 [HYPERLINK "<https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/abcdd2/meta>"]
- Ciais, P., C. Sabine, G. Bala, L. Bopp, V. Brovkin, *et al.* (2013): Carbon and Other Biogeochemical Cycles. In: *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Stocker, T.F., D. Qin, G.-K. Plattner, M. Tignor, *et al.* (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA
- Connolly, Roman, Willie Soon, Michael Connolly *et al.* (2021) How much has the Sun influenced Northern Hemisphere temperature trends? An ongoing debate *Research in Astronomy and Astrophysics* 21(6) doi: 10.1088/1674-4527/21/6/131 [HYPERLINK "<https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1674-4527/21/6/131>"]
- Crisp, David & Dolman, Han (A.J.) & Tanhua, Toste & McKinley, Galen & Hauck, Judith & Bastos, Ana & Sitch, Stephen & Eggleston, Simon & Aich, Valentin. (2022). How Well Do We Understand the Land-Ocean-Atmosphere Carbon Cycle?. *Reviews of Geophysics*. 60. 10.1029/2021RG000736.
- De Laat, A.T.J., and A.N. Maurellis (2006), Evidence for influence of anthropogenic surface processes on lower tropospheric and surface temperature trends, *International Journal of Climatology* 26:897—913.
- Friedlingstein, P., and 95 co-authors (2024): Global Carbon Budget 2024, *Earth System Science Data* 14(4), [HYPERLINK "<https://essd.copernicus.org/preprints/essd-2024-519>"]
- Hausfather *et al.* (2019) “Evaluating the Performance of Past Climate Model Projections” *Geophysical Research Letters* 47(1) [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2019GL085378>"]
- Hausfather, Z. and G. Peters (2020) “Emissions – the ‘business as usual’ story is misleading” *Nature* 29 January 2020 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00177-3>"]
- Jenkins, S., Smith, C., Allen, M. *et al.* Tonga eruption increases chance of temporary surface temperature anomaly above 1.5 °C. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* 13, 127–129 (2023). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-022-01568-2>"]
- Jones, P. D., P. Y. Groisman, M. Coughlan, N. Plummer, W.-C. Wang, and T. R. Karl (1990), Assessment of urbanization effects in time series of surface air temperature over land, *Nature*, 347, 169 – 172
- Liu, Pengfei *et al.* (2021) “Improved estimates of preindustrial biomass burning reduce the magnitude of aerosol climate forcing in the Southern Hemisphere” *Science Advances* 7(22) May 2021 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abc1379>"]
- McKittrick, R.R. and P.J. Michaels (2007), Quantifying the influence of anthropogenic surface processes and inhomogeneities on gridded global climate data, *Journal of Geophysical Research*, 112, D24S09, doi:10.1029/2007JD008465.
- McKittrick, Ross and Joel Wood (2013) Co-fluctuation patterns of per capita carbon dioxide emissions: The role of energy markets. *Energy Economics* 39 pp. 1-12 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0140988313000649>"]
- McKittrick, Ross R. (2010) [HYPERLINK "<https://www.rossmckittrick.com/uploads/4/8/0/8/4808045/spp.publishedversion.pdf>" \t "_blank"] [HYPERLINK "<http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/spp.2010.1.1/issue-files/spp.2010.1.issue-1.xml>"] Vol 1. No. 1., July 2010
- McKittrick, Ross R. (2013) Encompassing Tests of Socioeconomic Signals in Surface Climate Data. *Climatic Change* doi 10.1007/s10584-013-0793-5. Volume 120, Issue 1-2. [HYPERLINK "<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10584-013-0793-5>"]
- McKittrick, Ross R. and Nicolas Nierenberg (2010) [HYPERLINK "https://www.rossmckittrick.com/uploads/4/8/0/8/4808045/final_jesm_dec2010.formatted.pdf"]. [

- HYPERLINK "<http://iospress.metapress.com/content/n83k07278212/>"], 35(3,4) pp. 149-175. DOI 10.3233/JEM-2010-0336
- McKittrick, Ross R., Mark Strazicich and Junsoo Lee (2012) “[HYPERLINK "<http://online.library.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/for.2248/abstract>" \t "_blank"]” *Journal of Forecasting*, Vol 32, Issue 5, pp 435-451 DOI: 10.1002/for.2248.
- Oke, T.R., 1973: City size and the urban heat island, *Atmospheric Environment* 7, 769-779
- Parker, D.E. (2006) “A Demonstration that Large-Scale Warming is not Urban.” *Journal of Climate* 19:2882—2895.
- Peterson, Thomas C., Kevin P. Gallo, Jay Lawrimore, Timothy W. Owen, Alex Huang, David A. McKittrick (1999) Global rural temperature trends. *Geophysical Research Letters* February 1999 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/1998GL900322>"]
- Pielke, Roger and Ritchie, Justin (2020) “Systemic Misuse of Scenarios in Climate Research and Assessment” Social Sciences Research Network April 2020, available at: [HYPERLINK "<https://ssrn.com/abstract=3581777>"]
- Scaffeta, Nicola, Richard C. Willson, Jae N. Lee and Dong Wu (2019) Modeling Quiet Solar Luminosity Variability from TSI Satellite Measurements and Proxy Models during 1980–2018. *Remote Sensing* 11(21) 2569 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3390/rs11212569>"]
- Schoeberl, M.R., Y. Wang, G. Taha, D.J. Zawada, R. Ueyama and A. Dessler, 2024. Evolution of the climate forcing during the two years after the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai eruption. *J. Geophys. Res.*, 129.
- Soon, W.; Connolly, R.; Connolly, M.; Akasofu, S.-I.; Baliunas, S.; *et al.* (2023) The Detection and Attribution of Northern Hemisphere Land Surface Warming (1850–2018) in Terms of Human and Natural Factors: Challenges of Inadequate Data. *Climate* 2023, 11, 179. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3390/cli11090179>"]
- Spencer, Roy W, John R Christy and William D. Braswell (2025) Urban Heat Island Effects in U.S. Summer Surface Temperature Data, 1895–2023 *Journal of Applied Meteorology and Climatology* April 2025 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/JAMC-D-23-0199.1>" \t "_blank"]
- Wickham C, R Rohde , RA Muller, J Wurtele, J Curry, *et al.* (2013) Influence of Urban Heating on the Global Temperature Land Average using Rural Sites Identified from MODIS Classifications. *Geoinformatics and Geostatistics: An Overview* 1:2.
- Zacharias, Pia (2014) An Independent Review of Existing Total Solar Irradiance Records. *Surveys in Geophysics* 35 pp. 897—912 [HYPERLINK "<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10712-014-9294-y>"]

PART II: CLIMATE RESPONSE TO CO₂ EMISSIONS

4 CLIMATE SENSITIVITY TO CO₂ FORCING

Chapter Summary

There is growing recognition that climate models are not fit for the purpose of determining the Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity (ECS) of the climate to increasing CO₂. The IPCC has turned to data-driven approaches including historical data and paleoclimate reconstructions, but their reliability is diminished by data inadequacies.

Data-driven ECS estimates tend to be lower than climate model-generated values. The IPCC AR6 upper bound for the likely range of ECS is 4.0°C, lower than the AR5 value of 4.5°C. This lowering of the upper bound seems well justified by paleoclimatic data. The IPCC AR6 lower bound for the likely range of ECS is 2.5°C, substantially higher than the AR5 value of 1.5°C. This raising of the lower bound is less well justified; evidence since the AR6 finds the lower bound of the likely range to be around 1.8°C.

4.1 Introduction

The climate's response to increasing concentrations of CO₂ is central to the scientific debate on anthropogenic climate change, and so also to the public debate on "climate action." The simplest measure of that response is the rise in the global average surface temperature, quantified by the Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity (ECS). ECS is defined as the amount of warming expected in response to a doubling of CO₂ from its pre-industrial concentration of 280 ppm, after all climate components have had time to adjust. Some components, like temperatures in the lower atmosphere (troposphere), adjust rapidly, while others such as the deep ocean and cryosphere might take as long as centuries. A related measure, the Transient Climate Response (TCR), better describes the shorter time scales; it is defined as the amount of warming when the CO₂ concentration is doubled by rising one percent annually for 70 years.

The 1979 Charney Report for the U.S. National Academy of Sciences (National Research Council 1979) proposed that the most likely ECS was $3.0 \pm 1.5^\circ\text{C}$. The IPCC repeatedly reaffirmed that range with only minor variations until its most recent AR6. AR5 termed 1.5–4.5°C as the *likely* range (66 percent probability) and stated that ECS is *extremely unlikely* (95 percent probability) to be below 1.0°C and very unlikely (90 percent probability) to exceed 6.5°C.

The uncertainty in ECS has remained stubbornly wide, despite many individual studies that claimed to narrow it (Hausfather 2023). Most recently, AR6 narrowed the *likely* range to 2.5–4.0°C and deemed the *very likely* range to be 2.0–5.0°C. This narrowing on the low end is disputed, as will be discussed below.

Uncertainties in ECS are highly consequential for policy making. As will be discussed in Chapter 11, economic models use ECS values to project the costs of CO₂ emissions. The traditional value (3.0 °C) has typically yielded modest global social costs of CO₂ emissions, sufficient to justify some policy actions, but mostly deferred to later in this century. If ECS is very high (above 4.5°C) immediate aggressive emission controls become more imperative, whereas no CO₂ emission controls are economically justifiable for ECS below 2.0°C (Dayaratna *et al.* 2016, 2020). Obtaining a precise estimate is impossible, so policy making needs to account for the uncertainty.

By itself, the equilibrium warming effect of a doubling of atmospheric CO₂ is slightly more than 1°C (Soden and Held 2006). Larger values of ECS arise from positive feedbacks that amplify the CO₂ warming. Water vapor feedback is positive: a warmer atmosphere may have more water vapor, which itself is a powerful greenhouse gas. Warmer temperatures also result in less snow and sea ice cover, allowing the

Earth to absorb more of the sun's radiation. Some simple estimates of these feedbacks increase the ECS to around 2°C (Sherwood *et al.*, 2020).

Climate scientists use multiple lines of evidence to determine the Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity:

- Climate model simulations
- Historical observations
- Paleoclimatic reconstructions
- Process understanding of feedbacks

4.2 Model-based estimates of climate sensitivity

The ECS ranges given in IPCC AR4 and AR5 were obtained primarily by examining the behavior of large-scale climate models, also called General Circulation Models (GCMs). However, the IPCC changed course in its AR6 when it turned to a more direct data-driven methodology. Here we discuss some of the pitfalls of using GCMs to try to determine the Earth's climate sensitivity.

ECS is an emergent property of GCMs—that is, it is not directly parameterized or tuned. Historically, collections of parameterizations have been chosen to produce an expected value of climate sensitivity, particularly with regards to sub-grid-scale cloud processes, particularly in AR4 and to a lesser extent in AR5. Otherwise plausible GCMs and parameter selections have been discarded because of perceived conflict with this warming rate, or aversion to a model's climate sensitivity being outside an accepted range. For example, even in a CMIP6 model, Mauritsen and Roeckner (2020) state the following regarding their Max Planck Institute climate model (emphasis added):

“We have documented how we tuned the MPI-ESM1.2 global climate model to match the instrumental record of warming; an endeavor which has clearly been successful. Due to the historical order of events, the choice was to do this practically by *targeting an ECS of about 3 K using cloud feedbacks*, as opposed to tuning the aerosol forcing.”

In other words, the modelers chose an ECS value of 3°C and then tuned the cloud parameterizations to match their intended result.

Direct warming from CO₂ doubling is only about 1°C (Soden and Held 2006); further warming arises from climate feedbacks that are not explicitly resolved by the GCM but rely on parameterizations of physical processes. Higher values of ECS arise primarily from assumed positive cloud feedbacks, whereas the magnitude and even the sign of the feedbacks are very uncertain. Elements of cloud feedback include changes in the latitudinal distribution of clouds, changes in the distribution of cloud height (changes in low versus high clouds), changes to the phase of clouds (ice versus liquid), changes in cloud particle size (associated with changes in concentration and/or composition of aerosol particles), changes in the precipitation efficiency of clouds, and even changes in how clouds are distributed over the daily solar cycle (Curry and Webster, 1999). It is difficult for GCMs to simulate any of these processes correctly owing to their small scale, let alone predict how they will change in the future. Further, cloud processes modulate the magnitudes of the water vapor, lapse rate, and the surface albedo feedbacks.

ECS can be determined from climate model simulations by doubling the concentration of CO₂ and allowing several centuries for the warming to equilibrate. To avoid the necessity of such long simulations, “effective climate sensitivity” is commonly evaluated from a 150-year simulation in response to a sudden quadrupling of CO₂.

The spread of ECS values from the CMIP5 ensemble of climate models used in the AR5 was 2.0–4.7°C; that range increased for the CMIP6 models used in the AR6 to between 1.8 and 5.7°C (Chen *et al.*, 2021, Scaffeta 2021, see Figure 4.1). Far from settling the model-based sensitivity of climate system uncertainties appear to be growing. The main cause of the overall upward shift in ECS in CMIP6 relative to CMIP5 is a larger positive cloud feedback, driven by changes to the cloud parameterizations in many CMIP6 models (Zelinka *et al.*, 2020)

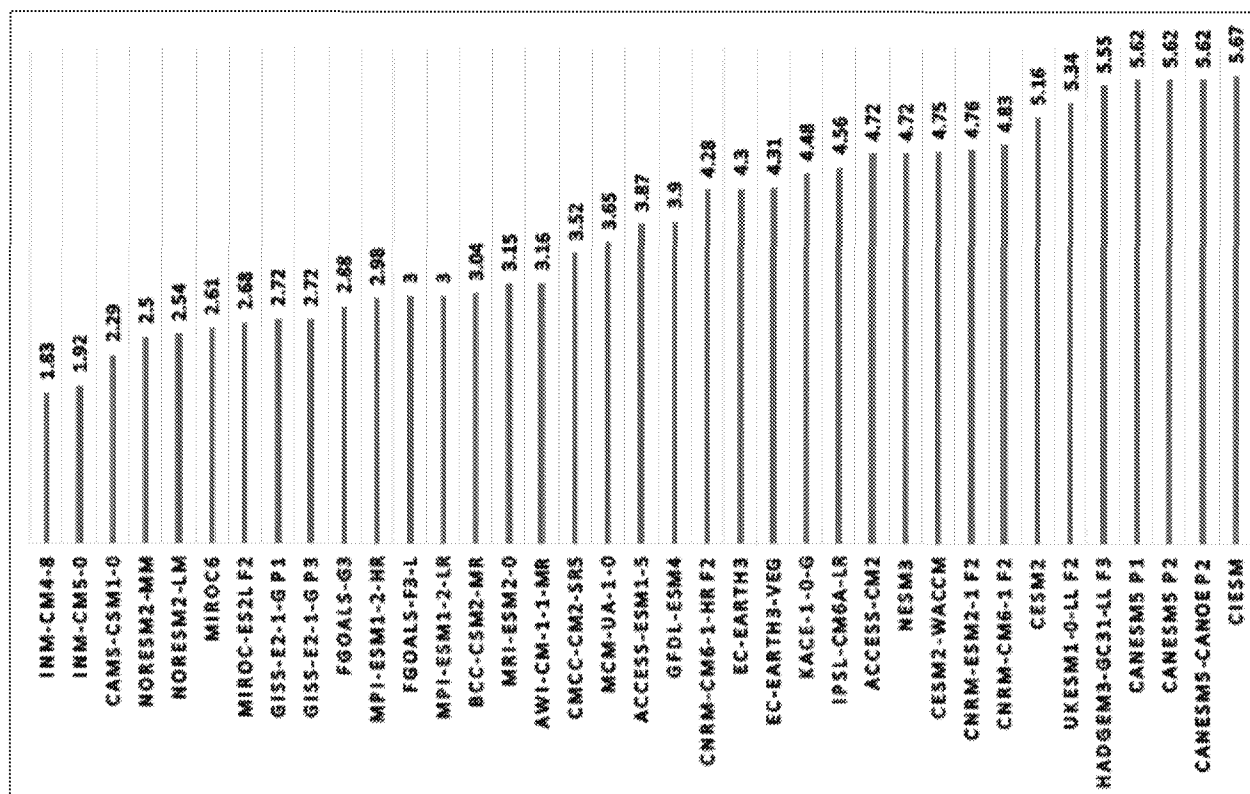


Figure 4.1 Equilibrium Climate Sensitivities in °C of 37 climate models from the CMIP6 ensemble. Identifiers for the various models appear along the horizontal axis. From (Scafetta, 2021)

Because of concerns about model tuning and the high sensitivity to cloud parameterizations, the IPCC AR6(2021) did not rely on climate model simulations in their assessment of climate sensitivity, relying instead on data-driven methods.

4.3 Data-driven estimates of climate sensitivity

Climate sensitivity can also be estimated from instrumental records of surface temperatures and ocean heat content, combined with estimates of how climate forcings (e.g., greenhouse gases, solar, volcanoes, aerosols) have changed in the past (Otto *et al.*, 2013). Using this information, a simple empirical model called an Energy Balance Model can be employed. It requires estimating a feedback parameter whose uncertainties are highly amplified in the resulting ECS (Roe and Baker, 2007).

The accuracy of the data-driven methods depends on the quality of the input data. Assumptions are needed about ocean heat storage, and good data is only available for recent decades. The greatest source of uncertainty is the amount and composition of aerosol particles and their interactions with cloud radiative properties (the so-called aerosol indirect effect; see Figures 3.1.1, 3.1.2). Climate models exhibit warming in response to GHGs but cooling in response to aerosols (Schwartz *et al.*, 2007). Observed 20th century warming can be shown to be consistent either with low ECS and low aerosol cooling, or high ECS and high aerosol cooling. Since fossil fuel use adds both GHGs and aerosols to the atmosphere, both effects need to be estimated to isolate the warming effect of CO₂. Over time, the IPCC’s estimate of the cooling effect of aerosols has declined (Lewis, 2023).

Paleoclimate proxies are also used to evaluate the sensitivity of past climates by comparing paleoclimate changes in the Earth’s temperatures to estimates of changes in forcings. The two most informative periods are the last glacial maximum (around 20,000 years ago), which was about 3–7°C colder than today, and a mid-Pliocene period (roughly three million years ago), which was 1–3°C warmer than today. The limits on cooling during the last glacial maximum give the best single evidence that high values of climate sensitivity are unlikely. However, paleoclimate estimates are associated with very large uncertainties in the estimated temperatures and forcings. Further, estimates of climate sensitivity based on past climate states may not be applicable to the current state of the climate system.

A recurring theme in the climate literature is that ECS estimates based on historical data are smaller than ECS estimates inferred from climate models (Sherwood and Forest 2024). About 15 estimates based on historical data appeared in the peer-reviewed literature between 2012 and 2024 yielding ECS best estimates between 1.0°C and 2.5°C, although critics have questioned some of the methods and the data quality. For the AR6, the IPCC placed primary weight on the results of Sherwood *et al.* (2020) that combined historical and paleoclimate proxies with the process-based approach and yielded a best estimate of 3.1°C with a *likely* range of 2.6–3.9°C. Lewis (2022) raised a number of concerns about this result, including methodological errors, outdated input values, and use of subjective versus objective Bayesian priors in the analysis. Lewis’ analysis found that climate sensitivity is estimated to be much lower and better constrained than in the Sherwood *et al.* analysis – median 2.2°C (1.8–2.7°C in the 17–83 percent *likely* range, and 1.6–3.2°C in the 5–95 percent *very likely* range). The IPCC AR6 estimated only a 5 percent probability that ECS was below 2.3°C, whereas Lewis estimated it to be over 50 percent. The most recent publications on the debate between Sherwood *et al.* and Lewis further defend their respective positions: Sherwood and Foster (2024) and Lewis (2025).

An argument emphasized in AR6 is that data-driven ECS estimates might understate the future warming response to GHGs because of a so-called “pattern effect” (Forster *et al.*, 2021). The tropical Pacific is believed to strongly influence the overall efficiency with which the Earth radiates heat to space, but some regions remove heat more efficiently than others. If the west-to-east temperature gradient in the tropical Pacific is weakened in a warming climate, warming would concentrate where heat is less efficiently removed, raising ECS.

Most climate models simulate that rising GHGs will weaken the west-east temperature gradient, which led the IPCC in the AR6 to conclude that data-driven ECS estimates understated the *future* ECS value. However, Seager *et al.* (2019) pointed out that, contrary to models, the west-east temperature gradient has been strengthening over time. They further argued that the mechanism predicting otherwise in climate models was based on a faulty characterization of oceanic dynamics and there is no reason to expect the gradient to weaken. A similar argument was recently made by Lee *et al.* (2024), who concluded that “the trajectory of the observed trend reflects the response to increasing GHG loading in the atmosphere”; in other words, GHG warming should lead to a future strengthening rather than a weakening of the temperature gradient. Increased efficiency of atmospheric cooling implies, if anything, that the future ECS in a warming climate may be *lower* than current estimates.

4.4 Transient Climate Response

The Transient Climate Response (TCR) provides a more useful observational constraint on climate sensitivity. TCR is the global temperature increase that results when CO₂ is increased at an annual rate of 1 percent over a period of 70 years (*i.e.*, doubled gradually). Relative to the ECS, observationally determined values of TCR avoid the problems of uncertainties in ocean heat uptake and the fuzzy boundary in defining equilibrium arising from a range of timescales for the longer-term feedback processes (*e.g.*, ice sheets). TCR is more generally related to peak warming and better constrained by historical warming, than ECS. IPCC AR6 judged the *very likely* range of TCR to be 1.2–2.4°C. In contrast to ECS, the upper bound of TCR is more tightly constrained. For comparison, the TCR values determined by Lewis (2023) are 1.25 to 2.0°C, showing much better agreement with the AR6 values than was seen in a comparison of the ECS values.

As will be discussed in Chapter 6, a real-world ECS smaller than the model average is supported by studies that show climate models on average overestimate the observed surface and troposphere warming over the past 50 years. Lower sensitivities also align with evidence from consistent fingerprinting (Section 8), where model responses need to be downscaled to align with observed trends.

References

- Carbon Brief. (2020, July 22). Explainer: How scientists estimate climate sensitivity. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.carbonbrief.org/explainer-how-scientists-estimate-climate-sensitivity>"]
- Carbon Brief. (2020, July 22). Guest post: Why low-end ‘climate sensitivity’ can now be ruled out. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.carbonbrief.org/guest-post-why-low-end-climate-sensitivity-can-now-be-ruled-out>"]
- Carbon Brief. (2021, August 9). In-depth Q&A: The IPCC’s sixth assessment report on climate science. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.carbonbrief.org/in-depth-qa-the-ipccs-sixth-assessment-report-on-climate-science>"]
- Chen, D., *et al.* (2021). Framing, context, and methods. In V. Masson-Delmotte *et al.* (Eds.), *Climate change 2021: The physical science basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge University Press.
- Curry, J. A., & Webster, P. J. (1999). Thermodynamic feedbacks in the climate system. In *Thermodynamics of atmospheres and oceans* (pp. 351–385). Academic Press.
- Dayaratna, Kevin, Ross McKittrick and David Kreutzer (2017) Empirically-Constrained Climate Sensitivity and the Social Cost of Carbon. *Climate Change Economics* April 2017 DOI: [HYPERLINK "<http://dx.doi.org/10.1142/S2010007817500063>"]
- Dayaratna, Kevin, Ross McKittrick and Patrick J. Michaels (2020) Climate Sensitivity, Agricultural Productivity and the Social Cost of Carbon in *FUND. Environmental Economics and Policy Studies* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10018-020-00263-w>
- Forster, P., *et al.* (2021). The Earth’s energy budget, climate feedbacks, and climate sensitivity. In V. Masson-Delmotte *et al.* (Eds.), *Climate change 2021: The physical science basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hausfather, Z. (2020, July 22). Explainer: How scientists estimate climate sensitivity. Carbon Brief. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.carbonbrief.org/explainer-how-scientists-estimate-climate-sensitivity>"]
- Lan, X., Tans, P., & Thoning, K. W. (2025). Trends in globally-averaged CO₂ determined from NOAA Global Monitoring Laboratory measurements. NOAA Global Monitoring Laboratory. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.15138/9N0H-ZH07>"]
- Lee, S., Byrne, M. P., Loikith, P. C., & O’Dell, C. W. (2024). Zonal contrasts of the tropical Pacific climate predicted by a global constraint. *Climate Dynamics*, 62(1–2), 229–246. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-023-06741-7>"]

- Lewis, N. (2023). Objectively combining climate sensitivity evidence. *Climate Dynamics*, 61(9–10), 3155–3163. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-022-06398-8>"]
- Lewis, N. (2025). Comment on “Can uncertainty in climate sensitivity be narrowed further?” by Sherwood and Forest (2024). *EGUsphere* [preprint]. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.5194/egusphere-2025-1179>"]
- Mauritsen, T., & Roeckner, E. (2020). Tuning the MPI-ESM1.2 global climate model to improve the match with instrumental record warming by lowering its climate sensitivity. *Journal of Advances in Modeling Earth Systems*, 12, e2019MS002037. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2019MS002037>"]
- Otto, A., Otto, F. E. L., Boucher, O., Church, J., Hegerl, G., Forster, P. M., Gregory, J. M., & Johnson, G. C. (2013). Energy budget constraints on climate response. *Nature Geoscience*, 6(6), 415–416. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/ngeo1836>"]
- Pachauri, R. K., & Meyer, L. (Eds.). (2015). Climate change 2014: Synthesis report. *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*.
- Roe, G. and M. Baker (2007). Why is climate sensitivity so unpredictable? *Science* 318, 629-632. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1144735>"]
- Scafetta, N. (2021). Testing the CMIP6 GCM simulations versus surface temperature records from 1980–1990 to 2011–2021: High ECS is not supported. *Climate*, 9(11), 161. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3390/cli9110161>"]
- Schwartz, S. E., R. J. Charlson, H. Rodhe (2007). Quantifying climate change—Too rosy a picture? *Nature Climate Change* 1, 23–24, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/climate.2007.22>"]
- Seager, R., Cane, M., Ting, M., Naik, N., Clement, A., DiNezio, P., & Lee, D. E. (2019). Strengthening tropical Pacific zonal sea surface temperature gradient consistent with rising greenhouse gases. *Nature Climate Change*, 9(7), 517–522. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-019-0505-x>"]
- Sherwood, S. C., & Forest, C. E. (2024). Opinion: Can uncertainty in climate sensitivity be narrowed further? *Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics*, 24(5), 2679–2686. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.5194/acp-24-2679-2024>"]
- Sherwood, S. C., Bony, S., Boucher, O., Bretherton, C. S., Forster, P. M., Gregory, J. M., & Stevens, B. (2020). An assessment of Earth's climate sensitivity using multiple lines of evidence. *Reviews of Geophysics*, 58(4). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2019rg000678>"]
- Soden, B. J., and I.M. Held (2006). An assessment of climate feedbacks in coupled ocean–atmosphere models. *Journal of Climate*, 19(14), 3354–3360. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/jcli3799.1>"]
- Zelinka, M. D., Myers, T. A., McCoy, D. T., Po-Chedley, S., Caldwell, P. M., Ceppi, P., Klein, S. A., & Taylor, K. E. (2020). Causes of higher climate sensitivity in CMIP6 models. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 47, e2019GL085782. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2019GL085782>"]

5 MODELS VERSUS OBSERVATIONS IN THE RECENT PAST

Chapter summary

Climate models show warming biases in many aspects of their reproduction of the past several decades. In response to estimated changes in forcing they produce too much warming at the surface (except in the models with lowest ECS), too much warming in the lower-and mid-troposphere and too much amplification of warming aloft.

Climate models also produce too much recent stratospheric cooling, too much water vapor increase, too much snow loss, and too much warming in the Corn Belt. The IPCC has acknowledged some of these issues but not all.

5.1 Introduction

Climate models are the primary tool used to project future climate changes in response to increasing atmospheric levels of anthropogenic greenhouse gases. To assess the fitness of climate models for this purpose, it is reasonable to ask how well they reproduce the current climate and its variations over the past century. The nearby box “Climate modeling” gives some detail on how climate models work.

Of great concern is the fact that, after several decades of the climate modeling enterprise involving approximately three dozen models operated by research centers around the world, the range of future warming they produce in response to a hypothetical doubling of atmospheric CO₂ extends over a factor of three, as we discussed in the previous chapter. This range of disagreement among models has not changed for decades.

Problems with climate models are not just in their disagreement over the future, but also in their ability to replicate the recent past. Here we review some of the most important metrics of climate model accuracy: ability to reproduce historical surface, tropospheric and stratospheric temperature trends, ability to reproduce the vertical warming profile and ability to reproduce other climate features such as snowfall and humidity. In all cases a persistent finding is that models on average err on the side of too much warming in response to estimated historical forcings.

BOX: Climate modeling

Most climate models, except for the simplest ones, represent Earth's land surface using a grid of squares on the order of 100 km wide. To simulate the atmosphere, typically 30 or more grid boxes are stacked above these squares. The ocean is modeled using a similar but finer grid, resulting in tens of millions of grid boxes for the atmosphere and oceans.

The computer models, based on physical laws, calculate how air, water, and energy move between grid boxes over time. The time step can be as small as 10 minutes, and repeating this process millions of times allows the simulation of climate over centuries. Running these models, even on the most powerful supercomputers, can take months. Comparing simulation results with historical climate data helps assess the accuracy of a model, while projections into the future estimate climate changes under assumed human and natural influences.

Despite sounding straightforward, climate modeling is highly complex. Many critical processes occur at scales smaller than the grid size. For instance, the flows of sunlight and heat in the atmosphere depend strongly on cloud cover. Since tracking individual clouds is impractical, researchers must make “subgrid” assumptions about the distribution of clouds in each grid box. Snow and ice cover, which affects how much sunlight is reflected or absorbed by the surface, is another subgrid factor.

Each subgrid assumption requires numerical parameters, which must be carefully set. Modelers initially estimate these parameters based on physics and observed climate patterns, then run the model. Because early results often diverge significantly from real-world observations, they “tune” these parameters to better match observed climate features. Different modeling teams use distinct assumptions and tuning strategies, leading to varied outcomes. Tuning is a necessary but delicate aspect of climate modeling, as it is in any complex system. Poor tuning can result in inaccurate simulations, while excessive tuning risks artificially steering results toward predetermined conclusions.

The spread of model representations of the current climate is very wide. One of the most basic indicators—Earth’s average surface temperature—varies by about 3°C across CMIP6 models prior to 1880 (Figure 6B.1), narrows slightly until 2040 then diverges to over 4 °C. For comparison 20th century warming was only about 1.0°C. This variation suggests substantial differences among models’ physical processes.

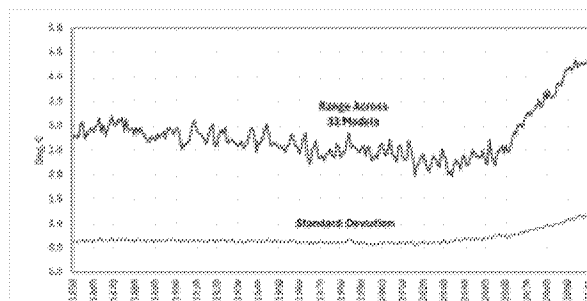


Figure 6B.1 CMIP6 Average surface temperature range across 33 models and standard deviation using SSP5-85 scenario. Data from KNMI Climate Explorer website at [[HYPERLINK "https://climexp.knmi.nl/start.cgi"](https://climexp.knmi.nl/start.cgi) \t "_blank"].

Beyond the models’ ability to reproduce features of today’s climate, the critical issue for society is how well they predict responses to subtle human influences, such as greenhouse gas emissions, aerosol cooling, and land-use changes. The most crucial aspect models must capture correctly is “feedbacks.” These occur when climate changes triggered by greenhouse gases either amplify or suppress further warming. In general, the modeled net effect of all feedbacks doubles or triples the direct warming impact of CO₂.

5.2 Surface warming

A straightforward test of a climate model's validity is its ability to reproduce historical warming in response to known past changes in climate drivers such as greenhouse gases. Figure 5.2 is reproduced from Scafetta (2023), a peer-reviewed study that groups the latest-generation (CMIP6) climate models into low ECS (1.5 to 3.0 degrees C), medium ECS (3.0 to 4.5 degrees C) and high ECS (4.5 to 6.0 degrees C), and compares their post-1980 global average temperature simulation ranges to those of three surface temperature records and one satellite-based lower troposphere temperature data product.

The leftmost column shows that the low-ECS models track the post-1980 historical warming record reasonably well, but the middle and right columns show that the medium- and high-ECS models conspicuously over-predict the warming.

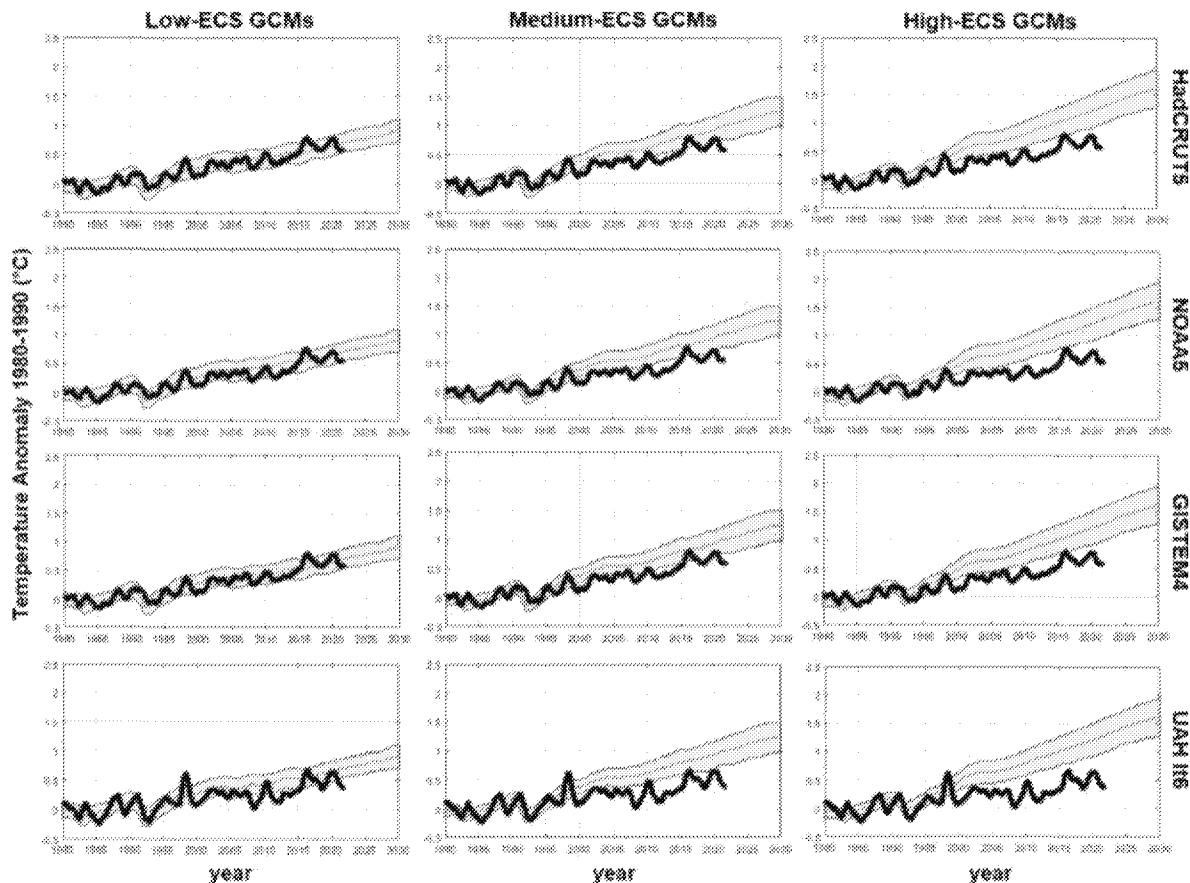


Figure 5.2: Model-Observational comparisons for Earth's surface warming. The columns correspond to model groups showing low-ECS to high-ECS, while the rows correspond to widely-used observed temperature records, the first three showing surface averages and the fourth showing the lower troposphere average. In each panel the yellow area denotes the mean and range ($\pm$ one standard deviation) of climate model simulations for that group. The thick black line shows the observed annual average temperature in the indicated source. Source: Scafetta (2023) Fig.2.

Spencer (2024) has also provided a useful summary of the Model-Observation mismatch by comparing trends in surface temperature data products with those in individual climate models, as summarized in Figure 5.3.

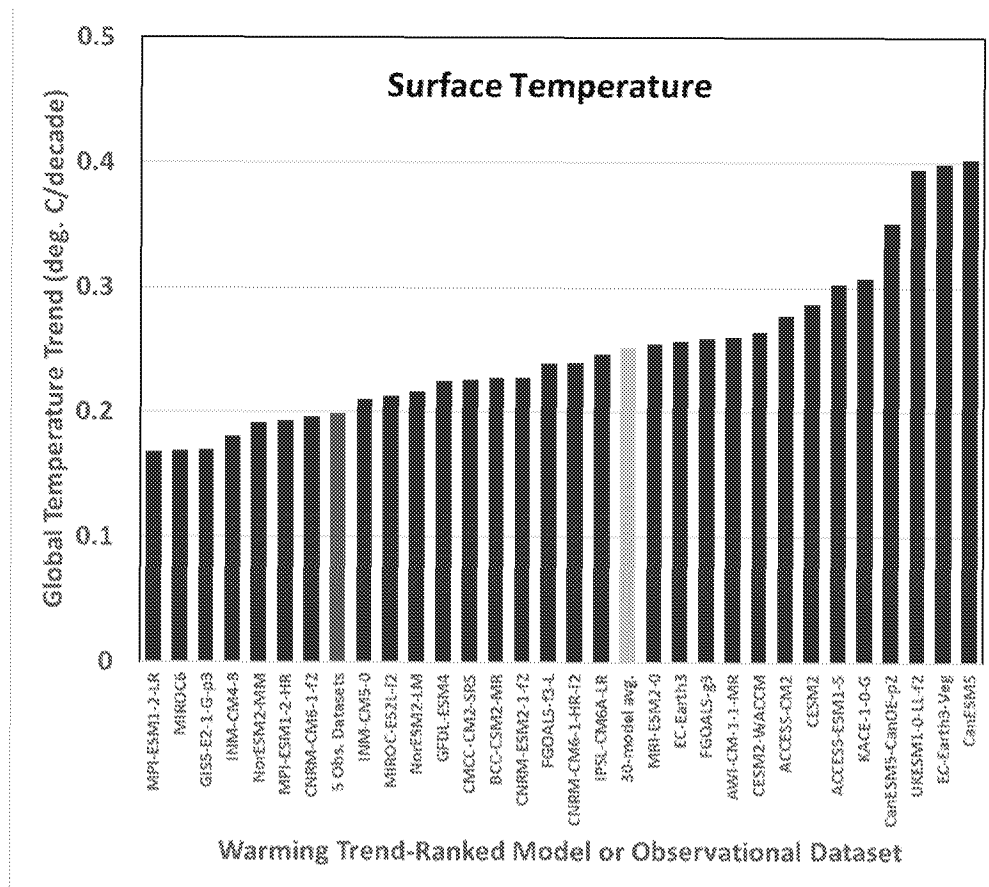


Figure 5.3 Global surface air temperature trends ($^{\circ}\text{C}/\text{decade}$), 1979-2024, from various CMIP6 climate models (red, 30-model average in orange); and the average of three thermometer datasets (HadCRUT5, NOAA Global Temp, and Berkeley 1 deg.) and two reanalysis datasets (ERA5 and NCEP/NCAR R1) in blue. Source: Spencer (2024) updated

5.3 Tropospheric warming

It has long been known that climate models on average overstate warming in the tropical troposphere. This region is an important test of the models since it has long been hypothesized that this is where the signal of anthropogenic greenhouse warming emerges first and most strongly. Biases in tropospheric trends indicate model flaws in heat transfer processes and carry over to surface warming biases.

The discrepancy was flagged as a serious inconsistency in the first U.S. Climate Change Science Program report (Karl *et al.* 2006) and has been mentioned in every IPCC report since, but the discrepancy has gotten worse over time, and the bias is now global. McKittrick and Christy (2020) compared tropospheric warming trends in CMIP6 climate models to observed trends from satellites, weather balloons and reanalysis systems. Every model overpredicted the average observed warming trend over 1979-2014 in both Lower- and Mid-Troposphere layers, both globally and in the tropics. In most individual models the bias was statistically significant and on average across models it was highly significant.

Figure 5.4 presents the comparisons with data updated to 2024. The recent warm years moved the observed trend up slightly and widened the trend confidence intervals but the overall pattern remains the same: model bias is towards too much warming, in most cases the difference is statistically significant and on average the bias is statistically highly significant. McKittrick and Christy (2020) also showed that the bias is larger in high-ECS models, but even the models with lower average ECS predict too much warming. If future climate models were to realistically represent global tropospheric warming, they would likely be less sensitive than even the low-ECS members of the CMIP6 ensemble.

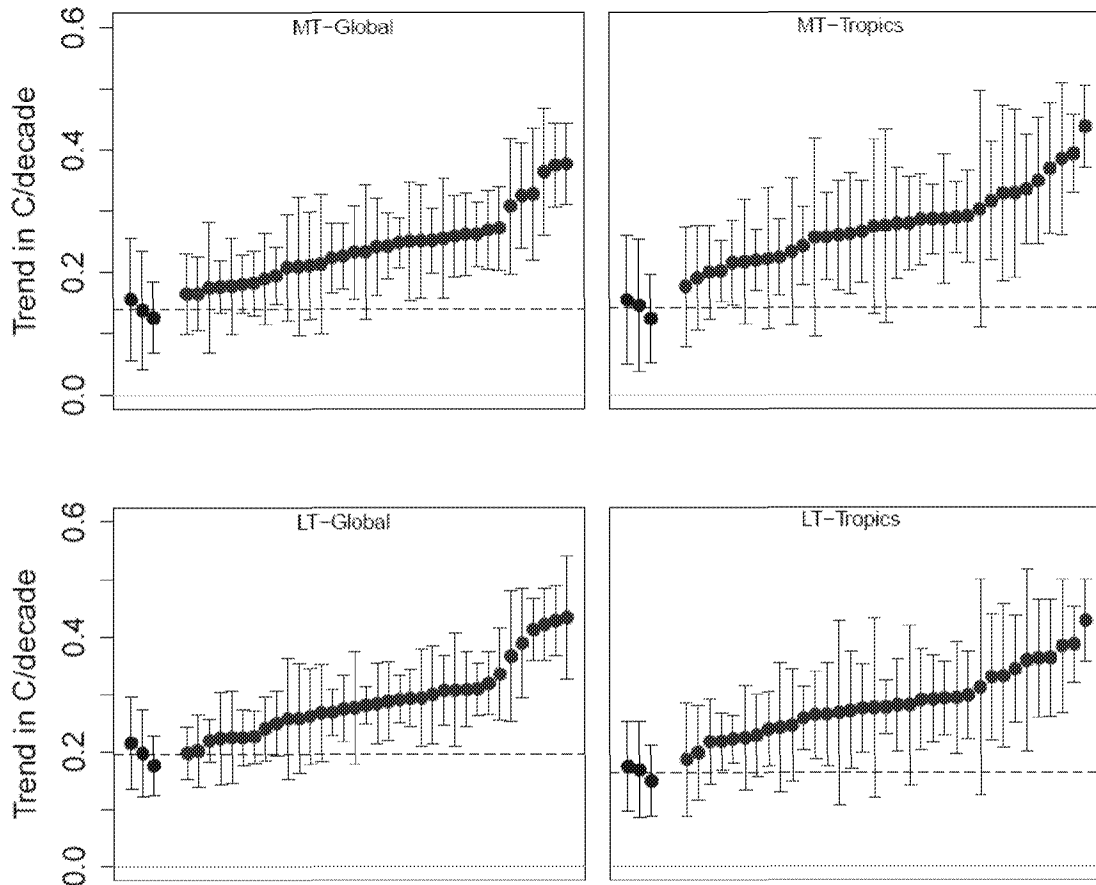


Figure 5.4: Observed versus CMIP6 modeled warming trends ($^{\circ}\text{C}/\text{decade}$ 1979-2024) in the global and tropical lower (LT) and mid-troposphere (MT). Uses methodology of McKittrick and Christy (2020) on updated data. Blue dots: warming trends with 95 percent confidence intervals for 3 data products (radiosondes, reanalysis, and satellites). Blue dashed line: warming trend average for 3 observed series. Red dots: modeled warming trends with 95 percent confidence intervals in 35 models arranged lowest to highest.

As mentioned, the IPCC has long acknowledged the model-observation mismatch. For example AR6 pp. 443-444 offers this on the tropical troposphere (it does not address the global comparison):

Several studies since AR5 have continued to demonstrate an inconsistency between simulated and observed temperature trends in the tropical troposphere, with models simulating more warming

than observations (Mitchell *et al.*, 2013, 2020; Santer *et al.*, 2017a, b; McKittrick and Christy, 2018; Po-Chedley *et al.*, 2021)... Over the 1979–2014 period, models are more consistent with observations in the lower troposphere, and least consistent in the upper troposphere around 200 hPa, where biases exceed 0.1°C per decade. Several studies using CMIP6 models suggest that differences in climate sensitivity may be an important factor contributing to the discrepancy between the simulated and observed tropospheric temperature trends (McKittrick and Christy, 2020; Po-Chedley *et al.*, 2021), though it is difficult to deconvolve the influence of climate sensitivity, changes in aerosol forcing and internal variability in contributing to tropospheric warming biases (Po-Chedley *et al.*, 2021). Another study found that the absence of a hypothesized negative tropical cloud feedback could explain half of the upper troposphere warming bias in one model (Mauritsen and Stevens, 2015).

... In summary, studies continue to find that CMIP5 and CMIP6 model simulations warm more than observations in the tropical mid- and upper-troposphere over the 1979–2014 period (Mitchell *et al.*, 2013, 2020; Santer *et al.*, 2017a, b; Suárez-Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2017; McKittrick and Christy, 2018), and that overestimated surface warming is partially responsible (Mitchell *et al.*, 2013; Po-Chedley *et al.*, 2021). Hence, we assess with *medium confidence* that CMIP5 and CMIP6 models continue to overestimate observed warming in the upper tropical troposphere over the 1979–2014 period by at least 0.1°C per decade,

Notably, despite the accumulation of evidence of excess model warming the IPCC only assigns *medium confidence* to the existence of a warming bias.

5.4 Vertical temperature profile mismatch

Another important model-observational discrepancy is the excess amplification with altitude found in climate models. The comparison was in the IPCC AR5 Chapter 10, although only in the online supplement (Figure 10.SM.1) and only in a figure whose formatting obscured the point. Figure 10.SM.1 is not referenced in the main IPCC report nor in any summary so readers would not have been aware of it. Although not apparent at first glance, it shows that the 1979-2010 warming in the lower troposphere is so small as to be consistent with no GHG forcing at all and is inconsistent with the model runs that do have GHG forcing. In Figure 5.6 we adapt IPCC AR5 Figure 10.SM.1 to draw out this critical point.

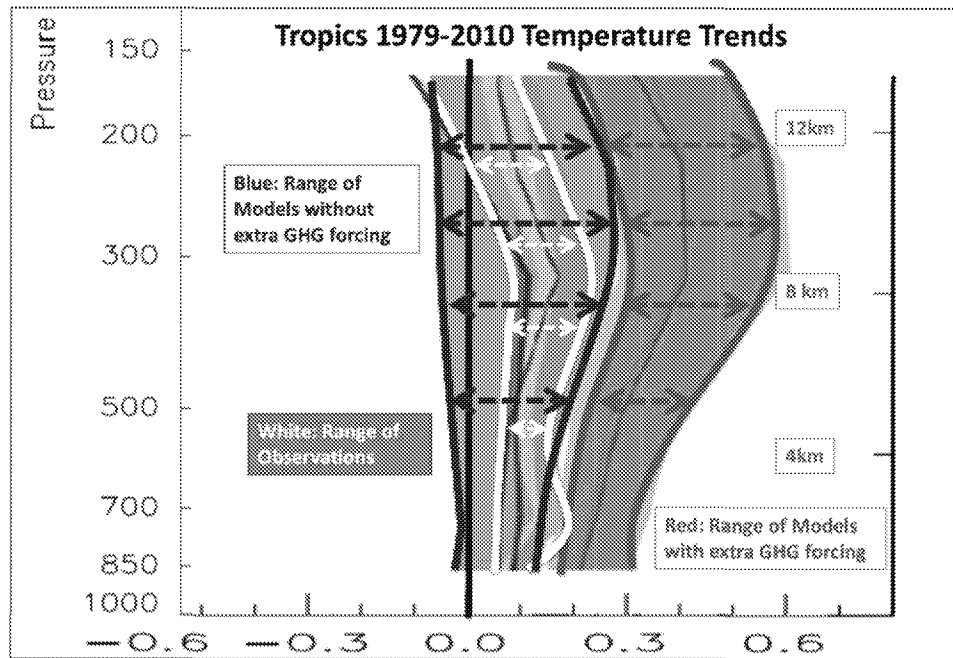


Figure 5.6: Vertical warming pattern for tropics (20S to 20N). Source: Annotated version of IPCC AR5 Figure 10.SM.1

Figure 5.6 compares model and observational temperature trends by altitude between 20S and 20N (the tropics). In this region where the models say the warming should be strongest, the observations (shown here in white) lie within the blue “No CO₂” band and entirely outside the “with CO₂” red envelope. This means that in the entire tropical atmospheric column from the surface to the base of the stratosphere, observed warming trends are so small as to be consistent with the output of models that have no anthropogenic CO₂ warming, and inconsistent with the entire envelope of warming trends generated by models forced with increased CO₂.

A similar comparison is shown in Christy and McNider (2017), an updated version of which (covering 1979-2024) is reproduced as Figure 5.7. Modeled temperature trends exceed observations from the surface through the top of the troposphere, with observed trends below the entire model range at most pressure levels. Also shown in Figure 5.7 is the tropical tropospheric temperature (TTT) average from three satellite data products (NOAA, UAH and RSS) compared to the same layer average from climate models for 1979-2024. Again, the observed trends lie below the entire model range.

The wide range of choices made by modelers to characterize the physical processes in the models (see Box: Climate Modeling in Section 5.1 above) is seen by the large spread of trends in the middle troposphere, ± 40 percent about the median (Fig. 5.7). This vividly illustrates the uncertainties in attempts to model (parameterize) a complex system involving turbulence, moist thermodynamics, and energy fluxes over the full range of the tropical atmosphere’s time and space scales.

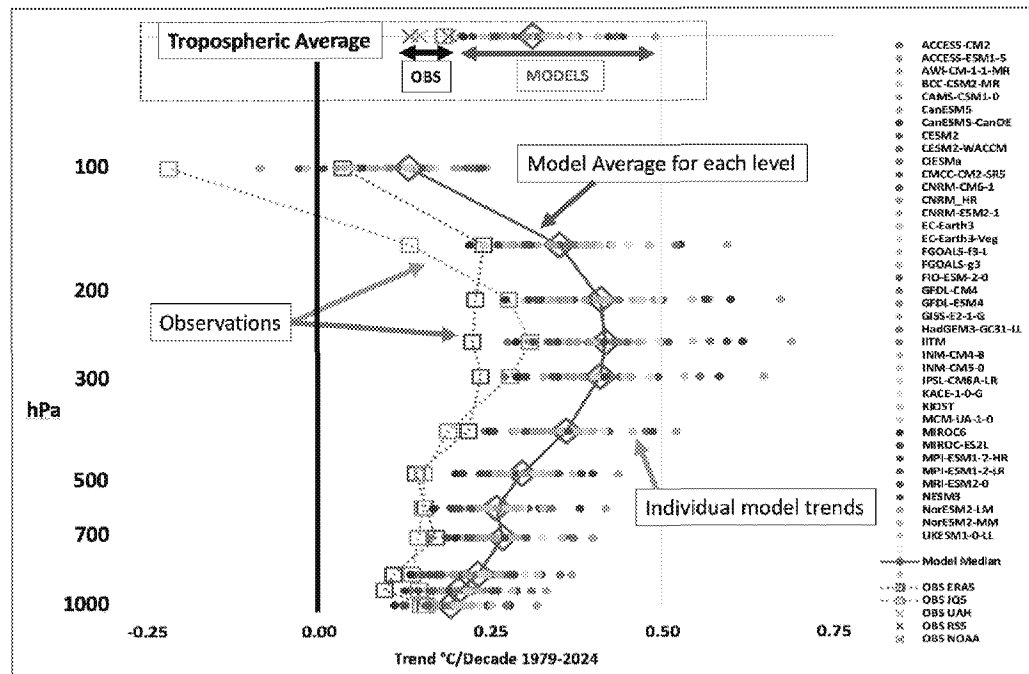


Figure 5.7: Modeled versus observed warming, tropical troposphere. Source: updated from Christy and McNider (2017) including data through 2024. Red line: model average. Green and blue lines: observational series (reanalysis).

This discrepancy has been the source of much controversy, with some arguing that even if there is very little observed warming aloft in the tropics, a “hotspot” still exists in the sense that the warming aloft is greater than at the surface. But there is good evidence that models also exaggerate the amplification rate. Klotzbach *et al.* (2009), showed that models project greater amplification with altitude than is observed. This result was subsequently confirmed by detailed time series analysis (Vogelsang and Nawaz 2016) who found that the model-observational difference is statistically significant.

The atmosphere’s temperature profile is a case where models are not merely uncertain but also show a common warming bias relative to observations. This suggests that they misrepresent certain fundamental feedback processes.

The IPCC AR6 did not assess this issue.

5.5 Stratospheric cooling

An important element of the expected general “fingerprint” of anthropogenic climate change is simultaneous warming of the troposphere and cooling of the stratosphere. The IPCC AR6 acknowledged that cooling had been observed but only until the year 2000. The stratosphere has shown some warming since, contrary to model projections.

The AR6 WG1 Ch 2 pp. 327-9 states:

Temperatures averaged through the full lower stratosphere (roughly 10–25 km) have decreased over 1980–2019 in all data products, with the bulk of the decrease prior to 2000. The decrease holds even if the influence of the El Chichon (1982) and Pinatubo (1991) volcanic eruptions on the trend,

found by Steiner *et al.* (2020a) to have increased the 1979–2018 cooling trend by 0.06°C per decade, is removed. Most datasets show no significant or only marginally significant trends over 2000–2019, and the results of Philipona *et al.* (2018) show weak increases over 2000–2015 in the very lowermost stratosphere sampled by radiosondes....

It is virtually certain that the lower stratosphere has cooled since the mid-20th century. However, most datasets show that lower stratospheric temperatures have stabilized since the mid-1990s with no significant change over the last 20 years. It is likely that middle and upper stratospheric temperatures have decreased since 1980, but there is low confidence in the magnitude.

The cited source, Philipona *et al.* (2018), in an article entitled “Radiosondes Show That After Decades of Cooling, the Lower Stratosphere Is Now Warming”, stated:

In response to continued greenhouse gas increases and stratospheric ozone depletion, climate models project continued tropospheric warming and stratospheric cooling over the coming decades. Global average satellite observations of lower stratospheric temperatures exhibit no significant trends since the turn of the century. In contrast, an analysis of vertically resolved radiosonde measurements from 60 stations shows an increase of lower stratospheric temperature since the turn of the century at altitudes between 15 and 30 km and over most continents. Trend estimates are somewhat sensitive to homogeneity assessment choices, but all investigated radiosonde data sets suggest a change from late twentieth century cooling to early 21st century warming in the lower stratosphere.

A combination of tropospheric warming and stratospheric cooling is a commonly-cited “fingerprint” of anthropogenic warming. Stratospheric warming since 2000 coincides with continued surface and tropospheric warming, a pattern that is not found in climate model simulations and is not apparently consistent with the anthropogenic fingerprint.

5.6 Snow cover mismatch

Data compiled by the Rutgers University Snow Lab show that Northern Hemisphere winter snow cover is not decreasing (Figure 5.8); if anything, it shows an increasing trend.

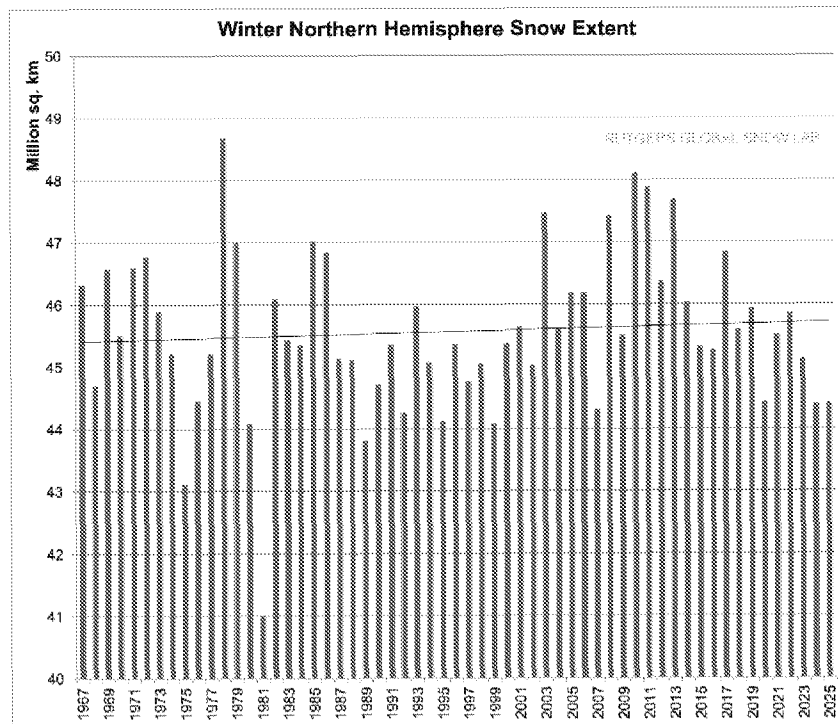


Figure 5.8: Northern Hemisphere Winter Snow extent.

Source: [[HYPERLINK](https://climate.rutgers.edu/snowcover/chart_seasonal.php?ui_set=nhl&ui_season=1)]

"https://climate.rutgers.edu/snowcover/chart_seasonal.php?ui_set=nhl&ui_season=1"]
(accessed May 27, 2025)

Yet models project declining Northern Hemisphere snow cover in a warming climate, as described by Connolly *et al.* (2019).

The climate models were found to poorly explain the observed trends [in Northern Hemisphere snow cover]. While the models suggest snow cover should have steadily decreased for all four seasons, only spring and summer exhibited a long-term decrease, and the pattern of the observed decreases for these seasons was quite different from the modelled predictions. Moreover, the observed trends for autumn and winter suggest a long-term increase, although these trends were not statistically significant.

AR6 largely confines its discussion of changing Northern Hemisphere snow cover extent (SCE) to the Spring season, for which models and observations agree on a downward trend. Regarding Winter changes it remarks as follows (AR6 WGI Ch. 2 p. 344):

Assessment of SCE trends in the NH since 1978 indicates that for the October to February period there is substantial uncertainty in trends with the sign dependent on the observational product. Analysis using the NOAA Climate Data Record shows an increase in October to February SCE (Hernández-Henríquez *et al.*, 2015; Kunkel *et al.*, 2016) while analyses based on satellite borne optical sensors (Hori *et al.*, 2017) or multi-observation products (Mudryk *et al.*, 2020) show a negative trend for all seasons.

AR6 WGI Chapter 9 (p. 1284) points out that the NOAA Climate Data Record showing increased fall and winter SCE is inconsistent with land-based observations and model-based data sets. It notes that using optical satellite imagery to infer SCE in winter is challenging due to cloud cover and decreased solar illumination in winter months. Focusing on the Pacific Coast states (CA, OR and WA) cold season mountain snowfall that melts in spring and summer provides a substantial portion of warm season water resources. A comprehensive reconstruction of snowfall for the main source regions (Cascades and Sierra Nevada Mountains) indicates no significant trends in annual totals since the late 19th century (Christy 2022).

In summary, the up-to-date Rutgers SCE database indicates a mismatch between models and observations. Further work to reconcile conflicting trends in observational data sets is required.

5.7 Hemispheric symmetry of the planetary albedo

The planetary albedo is the fraction of incoming solar radiation reflected by the Earth back to space. It is an important element of the radiative energy balance and influences whether the planet will warm or cool over time. The planetary albedo is typically estimated at around 0.30; variations on the scale of 0.01 correspond to changes in solar forcing of about 3 W/m^2 , an amount larger than current anthropogenic forcing. It has long been noted that models disagree with each other and with observations on the value of the global planetary albedo (Stephens *et al.* 2015).

An intriguing property of the Earth's albedo is that, on average, the Northern Hemisphere (NH) and Southern Hemisphere (SH) have had nearly the same albedo at least throughout the fifty-year satellite record (Stephens *et al.*, 2015). This symmetry is surprising, because the SH has much more ocean than land. Since ocean is less reflective than land, the NH should have higher albedo. Clouds (which are highly reflective) are more common in the NH and so compensate the surface albedo imbalances of the two hemispheres. Datseris and Stephens (2021) show that this cloud compensation comes from the extra-tropical storm tracks of the SH, which are cloudier than those of the NH. While the mechanism for this hemispheric symmetry is unclear, it likely operates on large temporal and spatial scales.

The hemispheric symmetry of the albedo is a simple gross metric for climate models. Rugenstein and Hakuba (2023) defined that metric as the difference between the NH and SH annual mean albedos, expressed as Wm^{-2} of the reflected sunlight, and compiled it for the CMIP6 climate models, as shown in Figure 5.9. Most of the CMIP6 models do not reproduce the small observed asymmetry (about 0.1 Wm^{-2}) and even disagree as to which hemisphere is more reflective. Moreover, the magnitude of the asymmetry ranges up to 5 Wm^{-2} in some models, twice as large as the current anthropogenic forcing (about 2.5 Wm^{-2}).

The significance of unphysical albedo asymmetries in the climate models is not yet fully known. However, other model studies suggest that interhemispheric changes in albedo can alter poleward heat fluxes, meridional temperature gradients, storminess, and differences in hemispheric ocean heat storage. The discrepancy between models and observations further raises issues regarding cloud feedback processes and so more generally diminishes confidence in model projections of the future climate.

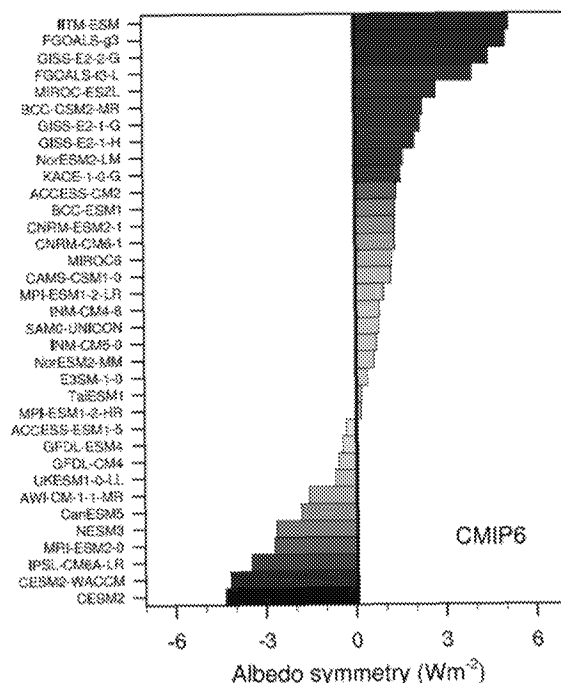


Figure 5.9. Differences in 20-year average reflectivity (albedo) between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres for CMIP6 models used in the most recent IPCC assessment (colored bars). The very small observed difference is indicated by the vertical black line. From Rugenstein and Hakuba (2023).

5.8 U.S. Corn Belt

One of the largest discrepancies between models and observations is in the U.S. Corn Belt, a region of particular importance to global food production. Figure 5.10 shows the warming trends for summertime (June, July, August) for the 12-state Corn Belt (IN, IA, IL, ND, SD, MO, MN, WI, MI, OH, KS, NE) during 1973-2022. All 36 climate models (red) warm far too rapidly compared to observations (blue).

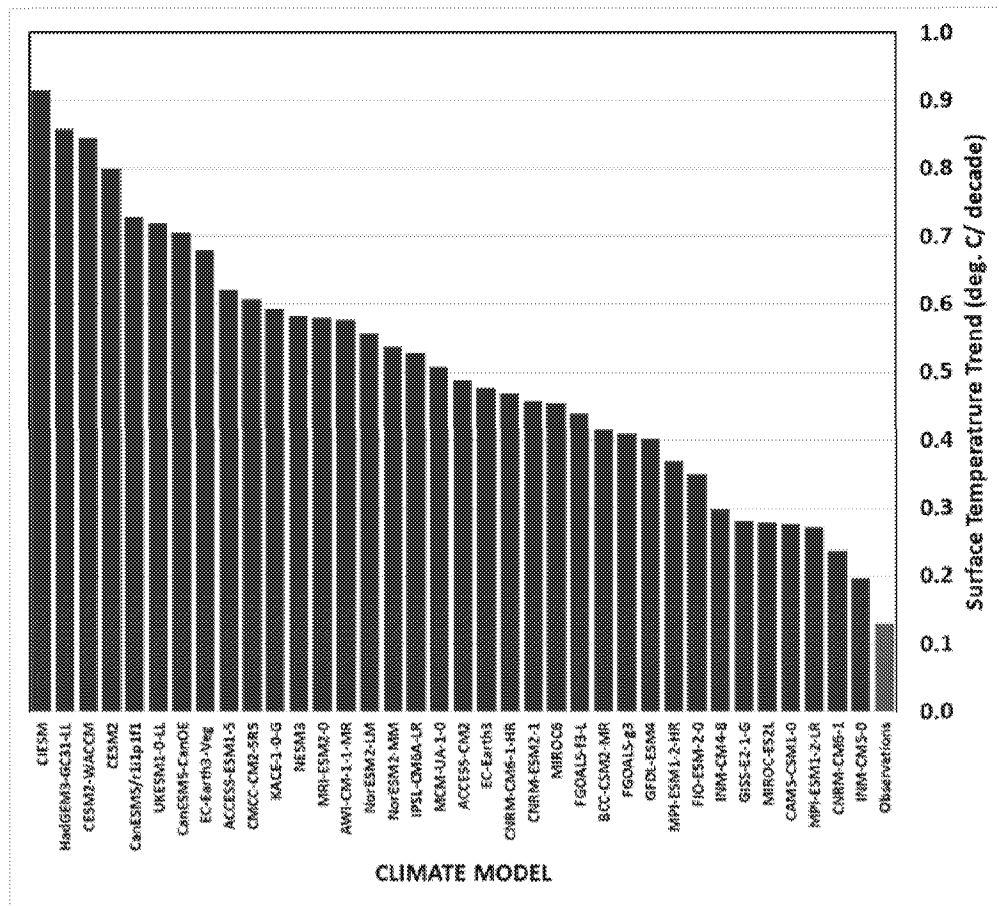


Figure 5.10: Modeled versus observed warming trends in the U.S. Corn Belt, 1973-2022.

As discussed in Chapter 9, the anticipated negative effects of increasing temperatures on U.S. corn yields have not materialized, in contrast to widely publicized studies proclaiming that theoretical future impacts are already being experienced (e.g. Seager *et al.*, 2018).

The IPCC acknowledges limitations in the accuracy of regional climate model outputs. This example shows that users need to assess model projections carefully on a case-by-case basis since local biases may be sufficiently large that the models are simply not fit for purpose. As has recently been noted by two leaders of the modeling community (emphasis added)

... for many key applications that require regional climate model output or for assessing large-scale changes from small scale processes, we believe that **the current generation of models is not fit for purpose**. (Palmer and Stevens 2019)

To summarize:

- Climate models show warming biases in many aspects of their reproduction of the past few decades.
- They produce too much warming at the surface (except in the models with lowest ECS), too much warming in the lower-and mid-troposphere and too much amplification of warming aloft
- They also produce too much stratospheric cooling, too much snow loss, and too much warming in the Corn Belt.

- The hemispheric albedo difference in individual climate models ranges widely in sign and magnitude compared to observations. The range in W/m^2 is three times larger than the direct anthropogenic forcing of CO_2 .
- The IPCC has acknowledged some of these issues but not others.

References

- Christy, J. R., R. T. McNider (2017). Satellite bulk tropospheric temperatures as a metric for climate sensitivity. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Atmospheric Sciences* 53, 511-518. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13143-017-0070-z>"]
- Christy, J. R. (2022). Time series construction of Oregon and Washington snowfall since 1890 and an update of California snowfall through 2020. *Journal of Hydrometeorology* 23, 1845-1860. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/JHM-D-21-0178.1>"]
- Connolly, R., M. Connolly, W. Soon, *et al.* (2019). Northern Hemisphere snow-cover trends (1967–2018): A comparison between climate models and observations. *Geosciences* 9, 135. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3390/geosciences9030135>"]
- Datseris, G., B. Stevens (2021). Earth's albedo and its symmetry. *AGU Advances* 2, e2021AV000440. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2021AV000440>"]
- Karl, T.R., S. J. Hassol, C. D. Miller, W. L. Murray, eds. (2006). Temperature Trends in the Lower Atmosphere: Steps for Understanding and Reconciling Differences. U.S. Climate Change Science Program/Subcommittee on Global Change Research. [HYPERLINK "https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc12017/m2/1/high_res_d/sap1-1-final-all.pdf"]
- Klotzbach, P.J., R. A. Pielke, Sr., R. A. Pielke, Jr., J. R. Christy, R. T. McNider (2009). An alternative explanation for differential temperature trends at the surface and in the lower troposphere. *Journal of Geophysical Research — Atmospheres* 114(D21). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2009JD011841>"]
- McKittrick, R., J. R. Christy (2020). Pervasive warming bias in CMIP6 tropospheric layers. *Earth and Space Science* 7. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2020EA001281>"]
- Palmer, T., and B. Stevens (2019). The scientific challenge of understanding and estimating climate change. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116(49), 24390–24395. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1906691116>"]
- Philipona, R., C. Mears, M. Fujiwara, *et al.* (2018). Radiosondes show that after decades of cooling, the lower stratosphere is now warming. *Journal of Geophysical Research—Atmospheres* 123. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2018JD028901>"]
- Rugenstein, M., and M. Hakuba (2023). Connecting hemispheric asymmetries of planetary albedo and surface temperature. *Geophysical Research Letters* 50, e2022GL101802. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2022GL101802>"]
- Scaffeta, N (2023) CMIP6 GCM ensemble members versus global surface temperatures. *Climate Dynamics* 60, 3091–3120 (2023). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-022-06493-w>"]
- Seager, R., J. Feldman, N. Lis, *et al.* (2017). Whither the 100th meridian? The once and future physical and human geography of America's arid–humid divide. Part II: The meridian moves east. *Earth Interactions* 22. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/EI-D-17-0012.1>"]
- Spencer, R. W. (2024). Global warming: Observations vs. climate models. Environment Backgrounder, The Heritage Foundation.

[[HYPERLINK "https://www.heritage.org/environment/report/global-warming-observations-vs-climate-models"](https://www.heritage.org/environment/report/global-warming-observations-vs-climate-models)]

Stephens, G. L., D. O'Brien, P.J. Webster *et al.* (2015). The albedo of Earth. *Reviews of Geophysics*.

[[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1002/2014RG000449"](https://doi.org/10.1002/2014RG000449)]

Vogelsang, T. and N. Nawaz (2016). Estimation and inference of linear trend slope ratios with an application to global temperature data: *Journal of Time Series Analysis* 38. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsa.12209"](https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsa.12209)]

6 EXTREME WEATHER

Chapter Summary

Most types of extreme weather exhibit no statistically significant long-term trends over the available historical record. While there has been an increase in hot days in the U.S. since the 1950s, a point emphasized by the IPCC AR6, numbers are still low relative to the 1920s and 1930s. Extreme convective storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and droughts exhibit considerable natural variability but long-term increases are not detected. Some increases in extreme precipitation events can be detected in some regions over short intervals but the trends do not persist over long periods and at the regional scale. Wildfires are not more common in the U.S. than they were in the 1980s. Burned area increased from the 1960s to the early 2000's, however it is low compared to the estimated natural baseline level. U.S. wildfire activity is strongly affected by forest management practices.

6.1 Introduction

High impact weather extremes, usually related to temperature, precipitation and/or high wind, can disrupt infrastructure and therefore endanger human health and wellbeing. The issue is not whether extremes occur. Rather, it is whether there are long-term (decadal scale) changes in the frequency or character of extremes (“detection”), as well as the extent to which such changes and the attendant changes in hazards are caused by anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases (“attribution”; e.g., IPCC AR6 Seneviratne *et al.* 2021).

It is naïve to assume that any recent extreme event is caused by human influences on the climate. Climate is about the statistical properties of weather over decades, not single events. Further, there are only about 130 years of reliable observational records that can be analyzed statistically. That brief interval does not begin to contain all the extreme events that the climate system can create on its own. Over geologic time the climate system has generated an (essentially) infinite variety of weather patterns and extremes that humans have never observed and thus are absent from the databases used to determine extreme statistics [see *Perils of short data records* below]. For that reason, attributing an extreme event unprecedented in the record requires assumptions about the magnitude of natural variations.

This chapter is concerned with detection of trends in extreme weather, while Chapter 8 considers causal attribution, with Section 8.4 specifically addressing extreme weather. If no trend is detected, then clearly there is no basis for attribution. But even where a trend is observed, attribution to human-caused warming does not necessarily follow.

This is especially true for precipitation events. The hydrological literature has long noted the phenomenon of *Long-Term Persistence* (LTP) in rainfall data (Hurst 1951, Cohn and Lins 2005, Markonis and Koutsoyiannis 2016). LTP has a formal mathematical definition, but it can be thought of as the presence of natural variations with strong autocorrelations that result in cycle-like behavior on long time scales. The presence of LTP requires long records to accurately estimate variability. Analysis of records that are short relative to the LTP scale will tend to underestimate variability, therefore overstating the significance of apparent trends and underestimating the likelihood of extreme events (Cohn and Lins 2005).

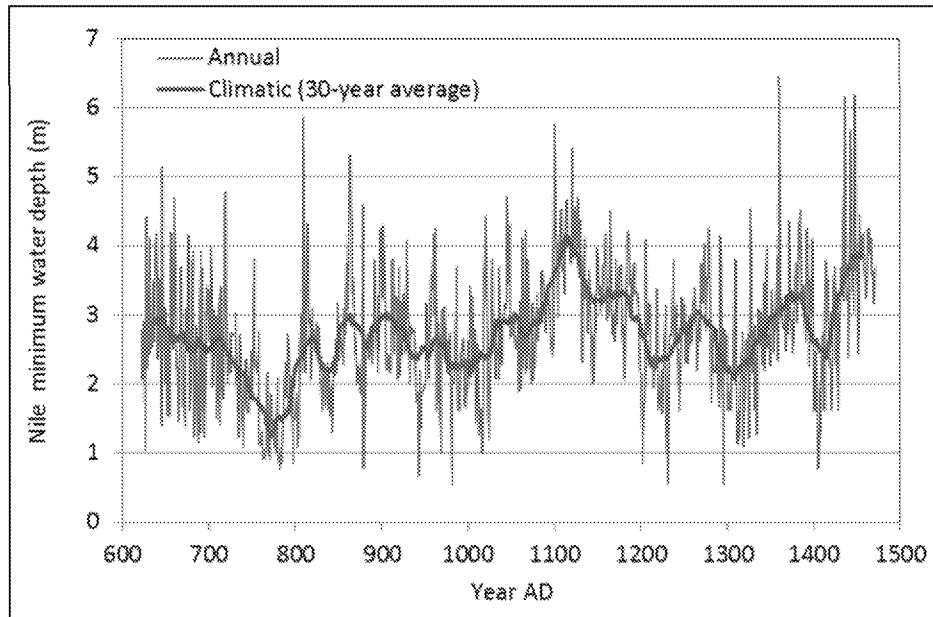


Figure 6.1.1: The annual minimum depth of the Nile River near Cairo over more than 650 years from 622 to 1284 A.D. The data, measured in meters, shows a characteristic pattern of year-to-year fluctuations around longer-term trends. Data from Koutsoyiannis (2013)

A good example of LTP is the eight-century long record of the annual minimum height of the Nile River observed at Roda Island in Cairo shown in Figure 6.1.1. The Nile River is fed by precipitation over a 4 million square mile drainage basin, an area equal to about one third of CONUS. Since human influences on the global climate were negligible before the 20th century, the century-scale variability of the thirty-year average is entirely natural; Egyptians of the seventh and eighth centuries would have been incorrect to assume that the worsening drought during that time was the “new normal.”

With these caveats in mind, we examine the evidence for changes in selected weather and climate extremes. A recurring theme is the wide gap between public perceptions and scientific evidence. It has become routine in media coverage, government and private sector discussions, and even in some academic literature to make generalized assertions that extreme weather of all types is getting worse due to GHGs and “climate change.” Yet expert assessments typically have not drawn such sweeping conclusions and instead have emphasized the difficulty both of identifying specific trends and establishing a causal connection with anthropogenic forcing.

In the sections to follow we provide excerpts from various IPCC and NCA assessment reports denoting the sources as follows:

SREX: The IPCC Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation (2012)

AR6: The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report Working Group 1 (2021).

NCA4: The U.S. Climate Science Special Report of the Fourth National Climate Assessment (2017) Volume I.

NCA5: The U.S. Climate Science Special Report of the Fifth National Climate Assessment (2023) Volume I.

In the excerpts, *italics* are in the original whereas **boldface** emphasis has been added.

Additionally we present updated data series from standard government sources to provide up-to-date information through 2024 wherever possible.

6.2 Hurricanes and tropical cyclones

The AR6 provides the following assessment of tropical cyclones (TCs; used here as a synonym for hurricanes):

AR6: There is *low confidence* in most reported long-term (multidecadal to centennial) trends in TC frequency or intensity-based metrics due to changes in the technology used to collect the best-track data. (IPCC, 2021)

AR6: It is *likely* that the global proportion of major (Category 3–5) tropical cyclone occurrence has increased over the last four decades . . . There is *low confidence* in long-term (multi-decadal to centennial) trends in the frequency of all-category tropical cyclones. (IPCC, 2023)

AR6: A subset of the best-track data corresponding to hurricanes that have directly impacted the United States since 1900 is considered to be reliable, and shows **no trend in the frequency of U.S. landfall events**.

Since 1980, when satellite observations fully covered the global oceans, we have confidence in the numbers of total global hurricanes and major hurricanes (Category 3 and higher). Figure 6.2.1 shows that on average, each year there are about 50 hurricanes, with about 25 reaching major hurricane status (Maue, 2025). There is substantial year-to-year and decadal variability, a weak decrease in the number of hurricanes, and a slight but insignificant increase in the number of major hurricanes. These two trends combine to create an overall increase in the proportion of major hurricanes.

Global hurricane statistics are dominated by the Northwest Pacific Ocean, which accounts for ~35 percent of total global hurricanes, whereas the Atlantic accounts for ~15 percent of global hurricanes (Colorado State University, 2025). Data in the Atlantic basin extends further back than in the other ocean basins and is most relevant to U.S. policy makers.

Global Major Hurricane Frequency – 12 month running sums -- @RyanMaue

Updated March 10, 2025

Last 30-years, annual: 45 H | 24 M

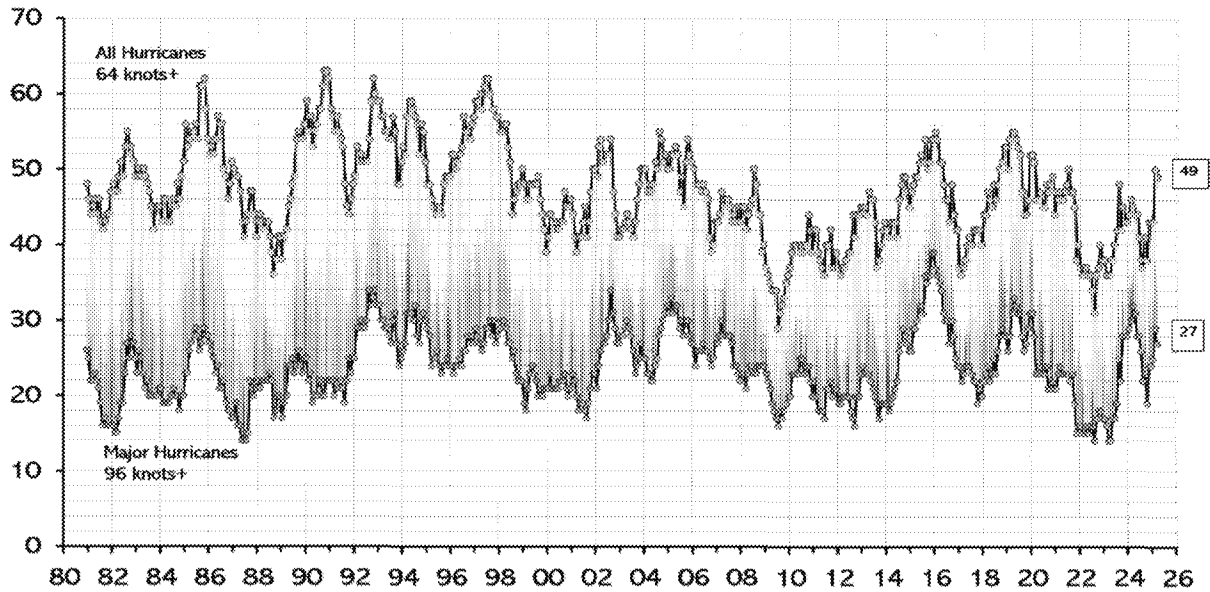


Figure 6.2.1: Global frequency of hurricanes and major hurricanes since 1980.

Figure 6.2.2 shows the frequency of Atlantic hurricanes and major hurricanes (Category 3 and higher) back to 1920. Data prior to 1965 (the onset of satellite observations in the Atlantic, shaded in blue) shows some undercounting, with data prior to 1920 showing substantial undercounting (Vecchi and Knutson, 2011). All measures of Atlantic hurricane activity show a significant increase since 1970. However, the period from 1971-1994 saw exceptionally low activity, with high activity (comparable to the past two decades, even with undercounting) also observed during the 1950's and 1960's, and even in the 1930's.

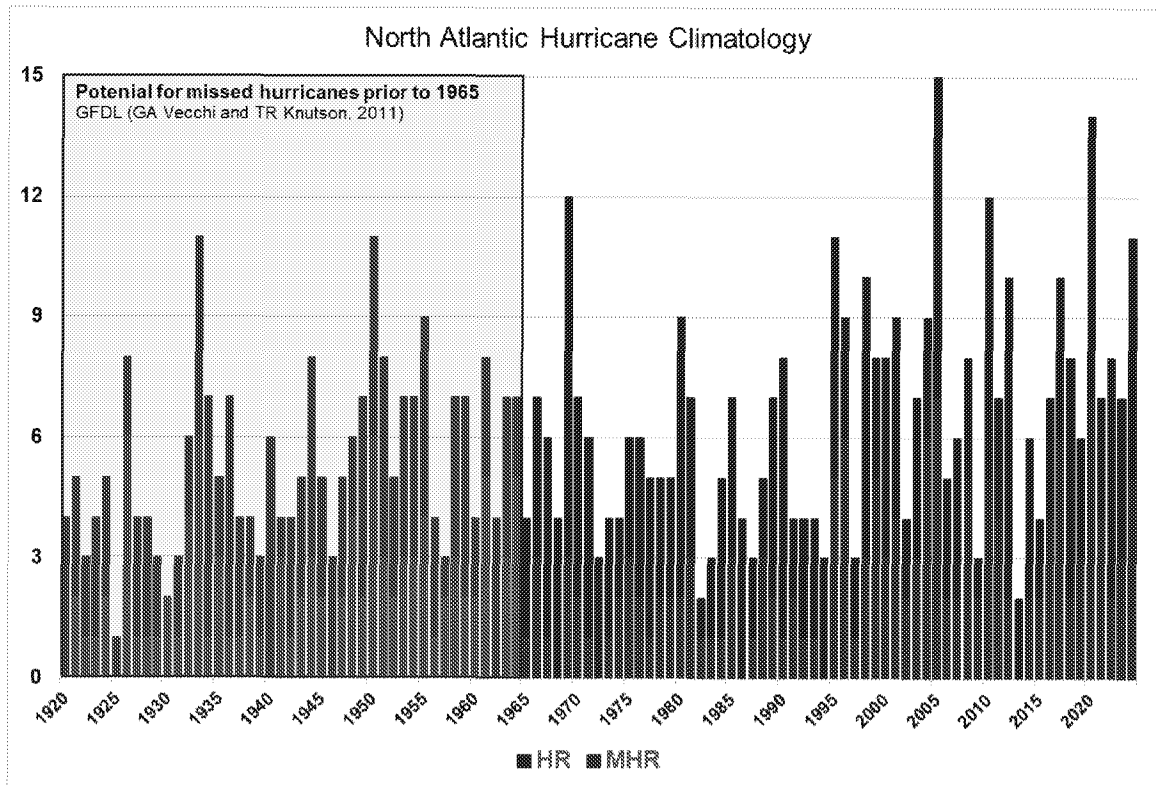


Figure 6.2.2: Atlantic frequency of hurricanes (HR) and major hurricanes (MHR) since 1920. Source National Hurricane Center (2024)

Figure 6.2.2 shows that Atlantic hurricanes vary strongly on decadal and multidecadal time scales. These variations are associated primarily with the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation (AMO), which is manifest in basin-wide sea surface temperature and sea level pressure fluctuations connected to large scale ocean circulation patterns. The AMO was in its warm phase during 1926-1970 and 1995-present, but in its cool phase during 1971-1994. It has its greatest impact on the number of major hurricanes (Category 3+), identified by Goldenberg et al. (2001) as associated with above normal SSTs and decreased vertical shear in the AMO warm phase (see also Bell and Chelliah, 2006; Klotzbach et al., 2018).

Klotzbach et al. (2018) conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the landfalling hurricane data for the Continental U.S. since 1900. Figure 6.2.3 updates their analysis through 2024. While the largest numbers of landfalling hurricanes are from 2004, 2005 and 2020, there is no statistically significant trend since 1920. Figure 6.2.3 also shows the time series for major hurricane landfalls (Category 3-5). The largest year in the record is 2005, with 4 major hurricane landfalls. However, there were no major hurricanes striking the U.S from 2006 through 2016, the longest such period since 1920.

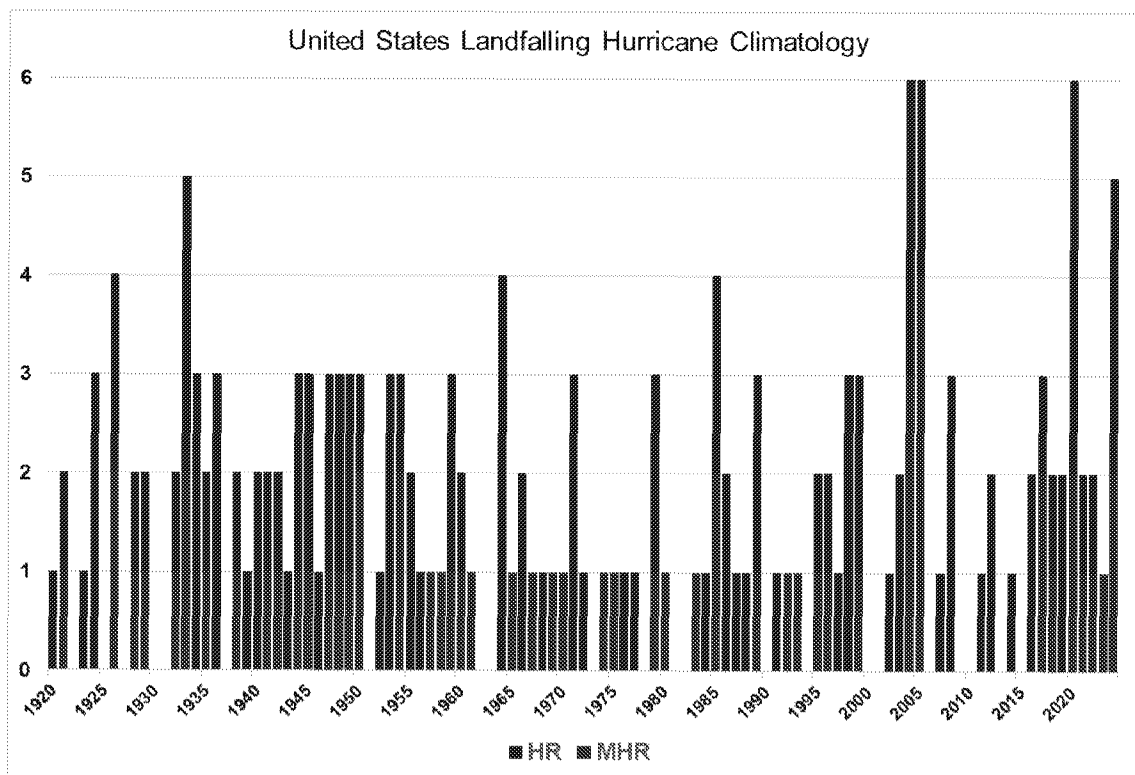


Figure 6.2.3: U.S. landfalling frequency of hurricanes (HR) and major hurricanes (MHR) since 1920. Source NOAA HRD(a) (2024)

Figure 6.2.3 shows substantial interannual to multidecadal variability in U.S. landfall activity. Klotzbach et al. (2018) examined how the landfall counts vary with ENSO (El Niño versus La Niña) and the warm versus cold phases of the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation (AMO).

Villarini et al. (2012) provide an analysis of U.S. hurricane landfalls back to 1878. While it is possible that some landfalls were missed in the late 19th century owing to sparsely populated regions on the Gulf Coast, it is remarkable that the highest year in the entire record is 1886, with 7 landfalls, when human influences on the climate were much smaller than they are today.

Table 6.2.1 shows the 10 strongest hurricanes (plus ties) to make U.S. landfall. Of the hurricanes that have made landfall with sustained winds greater than 150 mph, only one has occurred in the 21st century.

In summary, analyses of both global and regional variability and trends of hurricane activity provide the basis for detecting changes and understanding their causes. The relatively short historical record of hurricane activity, and the even shorter record from the satellite era, is not sufficient to assess whether recent hurricane activity is unusual relative to the background natural variability. Atlantic hurricane processes are influenced substantially by the natural modes of ocean circulation variability in the Atlantic, notably the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation. While it has long been hypothesized that a rising global sea surface temperature would cause an increase in hurricane intensity, identification of any significant trend in the hurricane data is hampered by a short data record and substantial natural variability.

Rank	Year	Landfall Wind (MPH)	Name
1	1935	185	"Labor Day"
2	1969	175	Camille
3	1992	165	Andrew
4	2018	160	Michael
5	1856	150	"Last Island"
5	1886	150	"Indianola"
5	1919	150	-----
5	1932	150	"Freeport"
5	2004	150	Charley
5	2020	150	Laura
5	2021	150	Ida
5	2022	150	Ian

Table 6.2.1 Strongest hurricanes to make landfall along the U.S. coast. Source (NOAA HRD(b), 2024)

6.3 Temperature extremes

The AR6 assessment focused on the period after 1950 and reported increasing trends in heatwave frequency and intensity. However, the NCA4 noted that heatwave activity in the U.S. reached a peak in the 1930s.

AR6: It is *virtually certain* that hot extremes (including heatwaves) have become more frequent and more intense across most land regions since the 1950s, while cold extremes (including cold waves) have become less frequent and less severe (SPM, A3.1)

AR6: In North America, there is very robust evidence for a *very likely* increase in the intensity and frequency of hot extremes and decrease in the intensity and frequency of cold extremes for the whole continent, though there are substantial spatial and seasonal variations in the trends. Minimum temperatures display warming consistently across the continent, while there are more contrasting trends in the annual maximum daily temperatures in parts of the USA. (Chapter 11, p 1550)

NCA4: Changes in warm extremes are more nuanced than changes in cold extremes. For instance, the warmest daily temperature of the year **increased** in some parts of the West over the past century, but there were **decreases** in almost all locations east of the Rocky Mountains. In fact, all eastern regions experienced a net **decrease**, most notably the Midwest (about 2.2°F [1.2°C]) and the Southeast (roughly 1.5°F [0.8°C]). (pp. 190-191)

NCA4: Since the mid-1960s, there has been only a very slight increase in the warmest daily temperature of the year (amidst large interannual variability). Heat waves (6-day periods with a maximum temperature above the 90th percentile for 1961–1990) increased in frequency until the mid-1930s, became considerably less common through the mid-1960s, and increased in frequency again thereafter. As with warm daily temperatures, **heat wave magnitude reached a maximum in the 1930s.** (pp. 190-191)

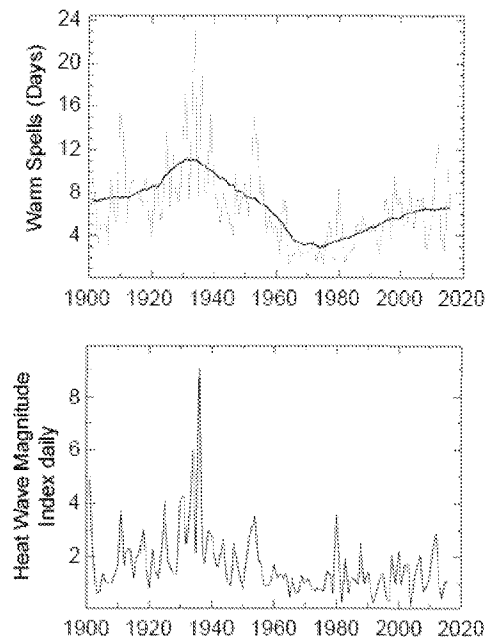


Figure 6.3.1: U.S. Heat waves since 1900. Source: NCA4 Figure 6.4

6.3.1 *Temperatures in the U.S. are becoming less extreme*

Daily maximum temperatures in the warm season (Tmax, May-Sep) and daily minimum temperatures in the cold season (Tmin, Dec-Mar) are available beginning in Dec 1898 (126 years). The dataset consists of 1,211 CONU.S. stations designated as United States Historical Climate Network or USHCN stations (see Figure 6.3.2; Quinlan *et al.* 1987, Karl *et al.* 1990). These stations were selected by NOAA as having the fewest problematic issues with gaps, station moves and instrument changes. Where gaps still exist, nearby stations (bias-corrected) were merged so that the median volume of data available for a station is 98%. Although there are certainly errors in the dataset, including unresolved spurious warming due to UHI effects that especially bias Tmin records, this data set is sufficiently accurate for assessing trends in Tmax heat extremes.

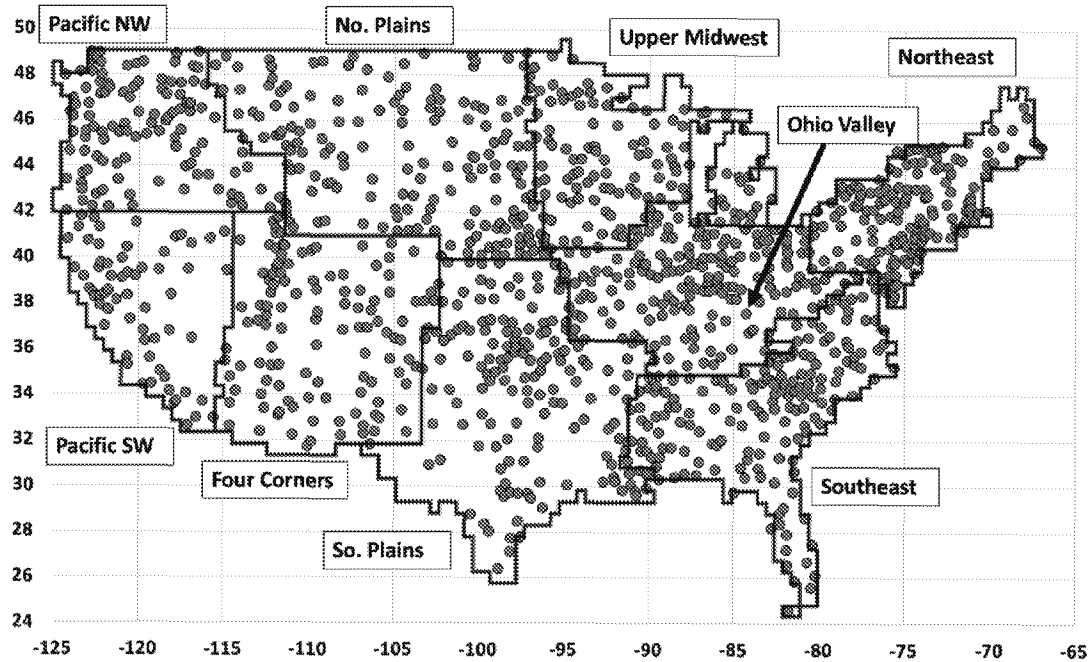


Figure 6.3.2 Locations of USHCN temperature stations. Source: USHCN.

We begin with the question of whether the occurrence of daily record high or low temperatures has changed since Dec 1898. Each warm-season has 153 days (1 May to 30 Sep) and each cold-season has 122 days (1 Dec to 31 Mar). For each station and day, we calculated the year in which the record highest (lowest) temperature occurred. With 126 years of observations, if there were no temperature trends over time, the expected number of records for Tmax would be 1.21 ($=153/126$) per station per year and for Tmin 0.96 ($=122/126$) per station per year.

Figure 6.3.3 shows the observed distribution in time of the occurrence of these extreme events. There is a common feature in many metrics of warm-season extremes in the CONUS - the exceptional heat of the 1920s and especially the 1930s, peaking in 1936. On a per-station average, 60 percent of the Tmax records and 59 percent of the Tmin records occurred in the first half of the period (1899-1961).

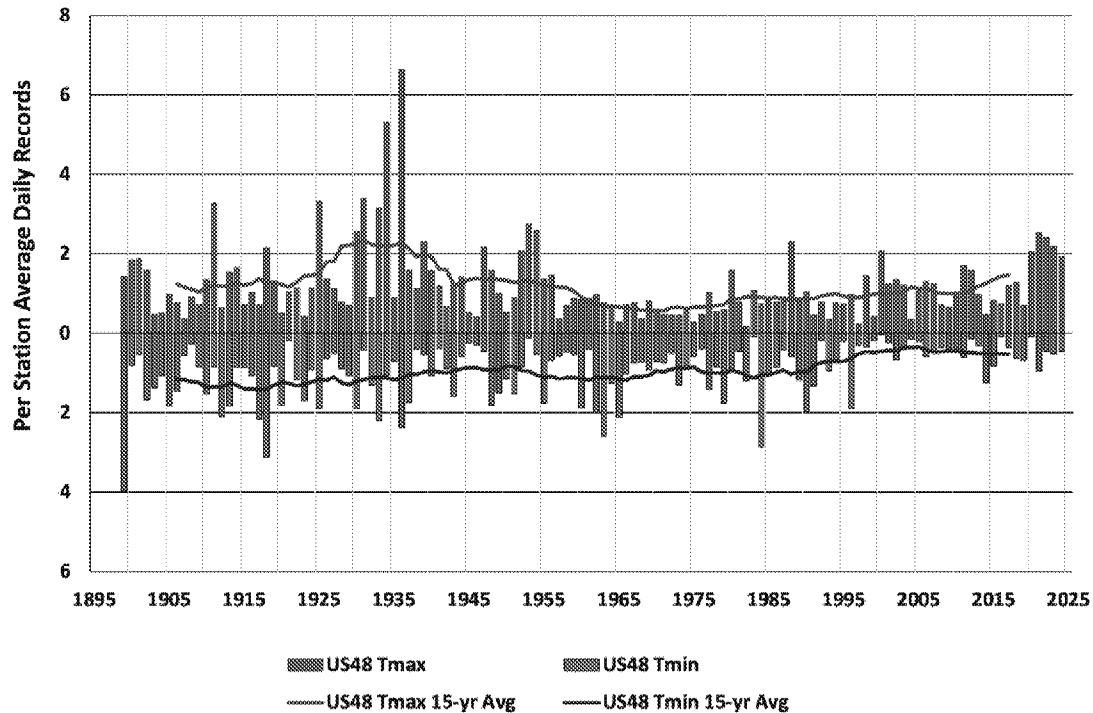


Figure 6.3.3 Number of daily record High (red) and Low (blue) temperatures for warm and cold seasons in the CONUS. The lines represent the 15-year running, centered average. Source: 1,211 USHCN stations supplemented as needed to achieve a minimum of 92 percent of observations in the 126-year period since Dec 1898. US48: contiguous U.S. states. Tmax: maximum temperature. Tmin: minimum temperature.

On the cold side, the Valentine’s Day Arctic outbreak in Feb 1899 stands as the most extensive cold extreme experienced by CONUS, with 1917 in 2nd place. The frequency of cold records has declined, especially over the last quarter of the period in which only 13 percent of the extreme cold events were measured. In contrast, 25 percent of the extreme Tmax records were achieved in the last quarter, in accordance with statistical expectations. These general features have been noted in past assessments (see above, IPCC AR6, NCA4). Combining the two records the overall reduction in numbers of both cold and hot extremes over the past century indicates a climate less prone to extremes.

This pattern is also shown in Figure 6.3.4. For each station and for each year the hottest warm season and coldest cold-season temperatures were calculated. Then the differences between these were computed by station and geographically-averaged over all stations, thus yielding an annual measure of the expected range of local extreme temperatures for each year. Figure 6.3.4 shows the 15-year trailing average of this measure, which has clearly declined over the past century.

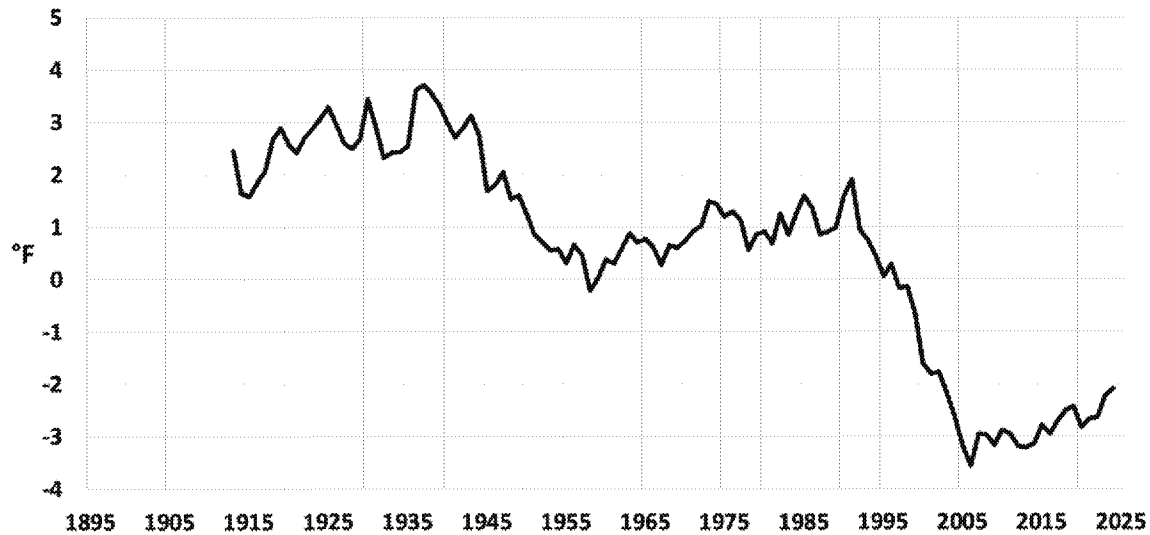


Figure 6.3.4. 15-year trailing average of the difference each year of each station's hottest warm-season Tmax and coldest cold-season Tmin relative to the long-term average. Source: Author analysis of USHCN data.

The average difference for each station between the hottest summer Tmax and coldest winter Tmin has declined by about 5°F in the past 126 years. The decline is due mostly to warmer winter Tmin, but a decline in summer Tmax is also a factor. The rise in Tmin has been strongly related to the growing presence of manufactured surfaces around the weather stations over the last 100+ years (the so-called urban heat island effect; Spencer *et al.* 2025).

In summary, while temperature extremes are regularly experienced in the U.S. and attract a great deal of media attention, long term records show the U.S. climate has become less extreme over time (milder) when measured by the range between warm season maxima and cold season minima.

6.3.2 Exceedances of a heat threshold

Under the heading of “The Risk of Temperature Extremes is Changing”, the most recent U.S. National Climate Assessment report (NCA5) notes the increase in a threshold metric of number of days at or above 95°F, stating,

The western U.S. has been particularly affected by extreme heat since the 1980s ..., experiencing a larger increase in days over 95°F, as would be expected given the greater warming in that region relative to the eastern US. Several major heatwaves have affected the U.S. since 2018, including a record-shattering event in the Pacific Northwest in 2021.

Are the occurrences of 95°F days changing? In a climate as varied as that of CONUS, threshold statistics can be misleading. A region with many stations that have near 95°F Tmax average temperatures in the summer might see large swings in the metric when only small changes in average temperature occur. Elsewhere with stations that either rarely or virtually always achieve 95°F Tmax temperatures, a small change will not have much impact on the results.

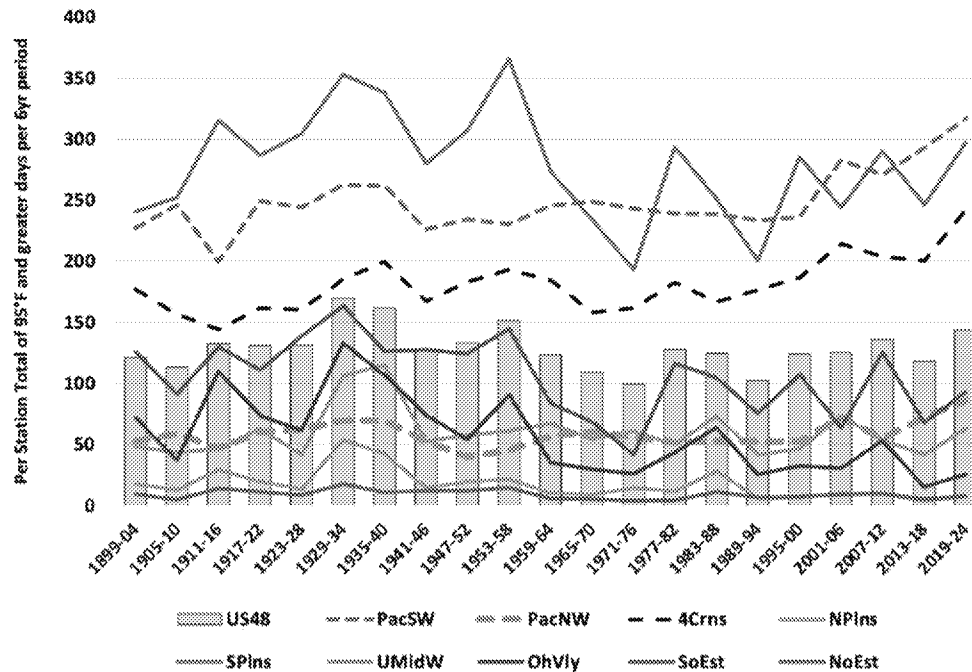


Figure 6.3.5. Total number of days $\geq 95^{\circ}\text{F}$ in 6-yr periods, U.S. 48 (bars) and regions (lines). A 6-year period is used as this evenly divides the 126-year record. US48: contiguous U.S. states. See Figure 6.3.2 for region names. Source: Author analysis of USHCN data.

In the past 126 years, the average CONUS station experienced 129 days exceeding 95°C per 6-yr period, but the regional values range from 278 in the Southern Plains to 9 in the Northeast. Thus, such threshold analyses must be interpreted with caution. Figure 6.3.5 shows that only three of the nine regions, all in the West, have experienced upward trends in the number of 95°F or hotter days (dashed lines). The CONUS as a whole has not, and the other six regions have experienced declines.

The Pacific NW heatwave of 2021 referenced in the NCA5 quote will be examined more closely in Section 8.6.1. The evidence indicates that it was a single, unprecedented event in the record, not part of a pattern of increasing extreme heat. For example, the 5-day average tropospheric grid-point temperature anomaly over the Pacific NW during that event was $+10.8^{\circ}\text{C}$, the most extreme Northern Hemisphere grid point summer anomaly in the 46 years from over 4 million grid values. In contrast, the global temperature anomaly during that time was virtually zero ($+0.03^{\circ}\text{C}$, Mass *et al.* 2024).

The NCA5 heading “The Risk of Temperature Extremes is Changing” suggests pervasive positive trends are now being observed in threshold temperatures, but that is not evident in the figures above.

6.3.3 Heatwaves

Heatwaves (consecutive days that exceed an extreme threshold) have a greater societal impact than a single daily record temperature. We measure “Heatwave Days” here as the count of all days in May-Sep each year that exceeded the 90th percentile for that day and that lie within a period of at least six consecutive days. This is equivalent to the method used in NCA4, except that the reference period here is the entire record 1899-2024 while NCA4 truncated the reference period to 1961-1990, which was a cool period. That truncation boosts positive results (days exceeding the 90th percentile) in periods warmer than the reference period, especially starting in 1960 and moving to the present (see *Urban Influences* below).

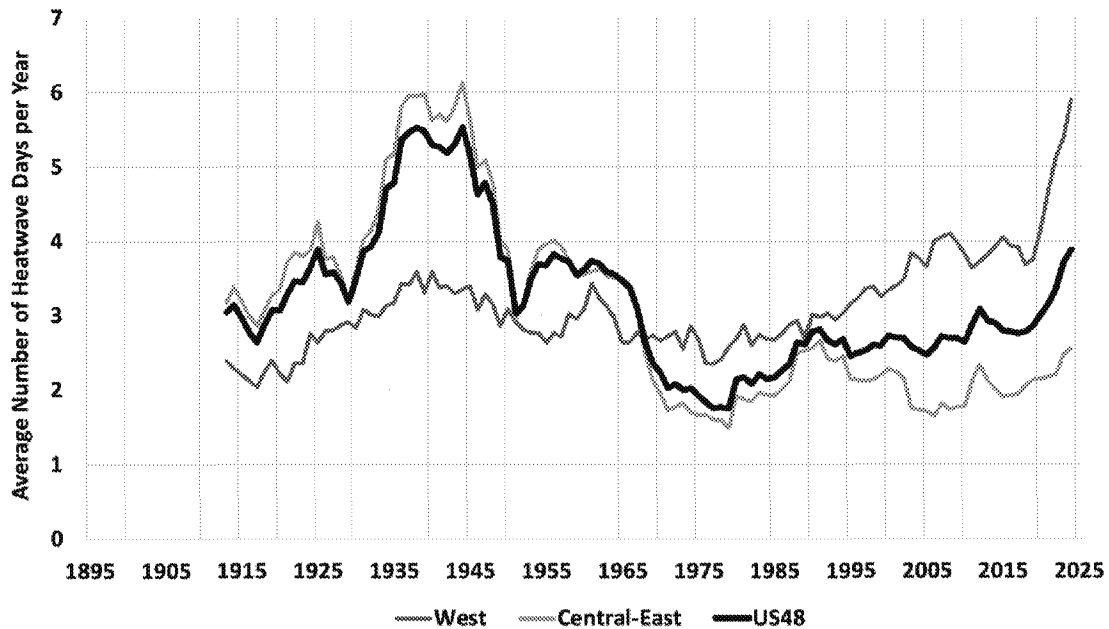


Figure 6.3.6 15-year trailing average of number of heatwave days per year per station in the CONUS (black line) and two regions: West (red), Central-east (green).

Figure 6.3.6 indicates that there are regional variations in heatwave activity. The excessive heat of the first half of the 20th century occurred primarily in the eastern two-thirds of the nation, while the West has seen a recent increase of heatwave days (NCA5). This indicates that the background warm season circulation favored heatwaves in the eastern portions of the country in the first half of the 20th century, but in the 21st century the patterns have favored heatwaves in the West. For CONUS as a whole, heatwaves are no more common today than they were a century ago, consistent with the upper panel of our Figure 6.4.1 taken from NCA4.

This metric varies significantly with region. The four northern regions (Pacific NW, Northern Plains, Upper Midwest, and Northeast) on average experience 15 to 27 heatwave days per 15-year period. In contrast, the five southern regions (Pacific Southwest, 4-Corners, Southern Plains, Ohio Valley and Southeast) see 37 to 54 such days, essentially twice as many. This suggests the summer circulation pattern is more prone to stationary events in the southern regions while transient systems in the northern regions are more common and thus cut short these potentially longer events.

The analysis of heatwaves is an example of why it is important to consider complete datasets and appropriate metrics. The NCA5 directs readers to the website [[HYPERLINK "https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves"](https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves)] (USGCRP 2023) to view a figure showing the number of urban heatwaves by decade from the 1960s, which we reproduce as Figure 6.3.7.

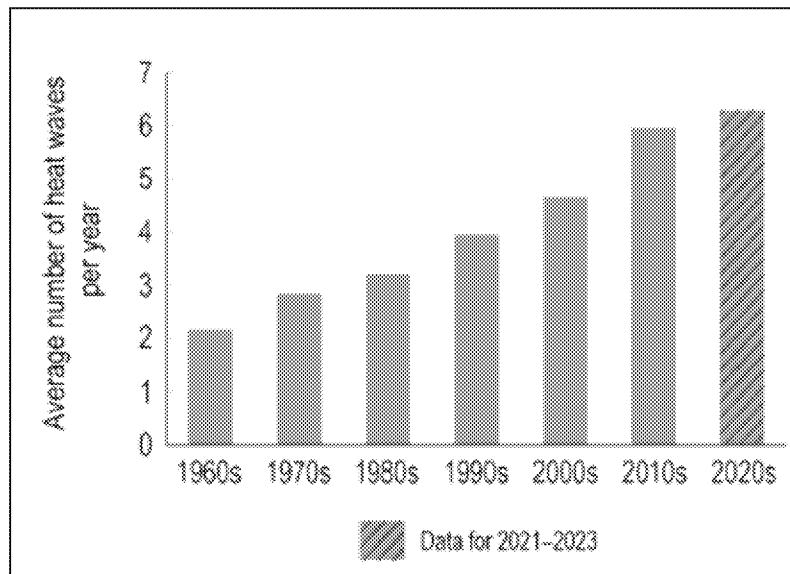


Figure 6.3.7: Average number of urban heatwaves per year for 50 large U.S. metropolitan areas, a misleading metric for reasons explained in the text. From [[HYPERLINK "https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves"](https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves)]

The figure shows a monotonic increase in each decade from 2 occurrences per year in the 1960s to 6 in the 2020s. The definition of a heatwave used is an unusual but practical measure of human discomfort - a period of at least 2 consecutive days when the *minimum* apparent temperature (combination of temperature and humidity) exceeds the 85th percentile. Note too, the dataset is limited to the 50 largest U.S. cities.

Given the unusual heatwave definition and urban focus, these increasing values since 1960 presented in USGCRP (2023) are not informative about long term trends or the influence of GHG emissions for at least two reasons. First, as shown in Figures 6.3.1 and 6.3.6, the 1960s was the coldest decade and 1970s the second coldest decade since the 1910's, so this starting date preconditions the time series to show increases. Second, post-1960 urbanization in these cities is a major factor in the rise of T_{min} relative to co-located T_{max} and relative to T_{min} at nearby rural stations. This does not dismiss the real rise in nighttime temperatures in major U. S. cities and the societal impacts associated with these changes. However, we note for a variety of reasons, that summer T_{max} (especially in rural areas) is a better metric for detecting changes in heatwaves influenced by changes in the background climate due, for example, to increasing GHGs (Christy *et al.* 2009). For the CONUS as a whole, the evidence in this section suggests GHG emissions have had little-to-no effect on heatwaves.

6.4 Extreme precipitation

The IPCC AR6 assessed that an increase in heavy precipitation has been observed in data starting in the 1950s.

AR6: The frequency and intensity of **heavy precipitation events have increased** since the 1950s over most land area for which observational data are sufficient for trend analysis (high confidence). (SPM A3.2)

AR6: In North America, there is robust evidence that the **magnitude and intensity of extreme precipitation has *very likely* increased** since the 1950s. Both [one-day maxima] and [5-day maxima] have significantly increased in North America during 1950-2018. (Chapter 11, p. 1560)

The U.S. National Climate Assessments (NCA4, NCA5) have highlighted an increase in the occurrence of the heaviest precipitation events (defined in different ways) primarily in the eastern half of the CONUS, especially the Northeast, when starting the analysis in either 1901 or 1958. Interestingly, the regional variations indicate that the largest increases in extreme precipitation events are in the Northeast and the smallest in the West, a pattern counter to the changes in temperature extremes.

McKittrick and Christy (2019) examined long-term and consistent station observations of extreme daily precipitation to test some of these NCA claims for the Southeast and West Coast using a trend model with a non-parametric variance estimator robust to the complex autocorrelation properties of precipitation data. When the time series were extended back in time (as far as 1872 in some cases) or when starting later (1978), there were no significant trends for either region.

These findings have been updated for this report (McKittrick and Christy 2025) with similarly constructed observations from 29 stations on the CONUS Pacific Coast (1893ff from San Diego CA to Blaine WA) and 24 stations in the humid Southeast (1872ff from Austin TX to Washington DC), also adding 27 stations in the Northeast (1888ff from Buffalo NY to Eastport ME). The locations are shown in Figure 6.4.1. The stations were selected based on availability of long-term high-quality records. The regions are each associated with important features of extreme precipitation behavior: the Pacific coast is associated with landfalling atmospheric rivers for which AR6 cites evidence of increasing activity since 1948 with further increases expected as the world warms (AR6 8.3.2.8.2); the NCA report indicates that the Northeast has experienced the greatest increase in extreme events, and the Southeast is also a place noted in the NCAs as having increased extreme events.

The results of applying the analysis of McKittrick and Christy (2019) were as follows for each region, then followed by further explanation.

Pacific Coast heavy rainfall events

- The average precipitation trend is statistically significant (downwards) in Astoria OR; insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant in Big Sur CA; insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant in Aberdeen WA and Big Sur CA and negative and significant in Newport OR (insignificant elsewhere).
- Averaged over all stations in the region, none of these three trend parameters is statistically significant.

The Pacific Coast receives considerable precipitation from Atmospheric River (AR) events which often last more than a day or two (e.g., Gershunov *et al.* 2017, Pan *et al.* 2024). The worst series of such events in recent history was the so-called ARkStorm that occurred between December 1861 and January 1862; it dumped nearly 10 feet of rain in parts of California and submerged the entire Central Valley for weeks under as much as 15 feet of water (Brewer 1930, Null and Hulbert 2007). Additionally, Paleoclimate research has found six megastorms more severe than 1861–1862 in California during the last 1800 years, occurring at intervals of 300 years or so (Porter *et al.* 2011).

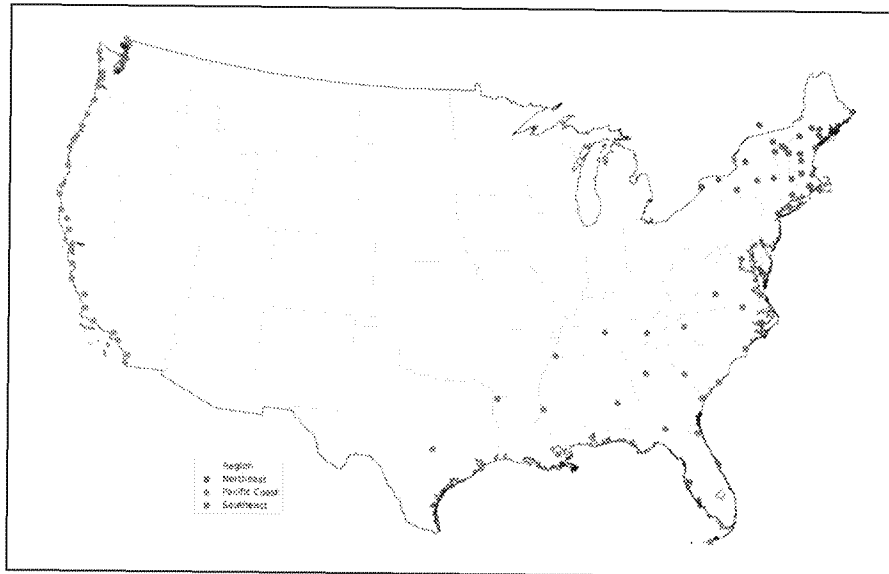


Figure 6.4.1: Locations of precipitation monitoring stations used in this report. Orange: Pacific coast. Blue: Northeast. Green: Southeast.

We examine occurrences of 5-day deluges as follows. Taking the Pacific coast as an example, a 130-year span contains 26 5-year intervals. At each location we computed the 5-day precipitation totals throughout the year and selected the 26 highest values across the sample. A single year may have more than one of the 26 heaviest. Each of those can be thought of as 1-in-5yr events. If there are no trends in precipitation, then the total number of these events across all stations should be evenly spread out over the years. In Fig. 6.4.2 we show the distribution in time of these events for the Pacific coast. The deluges associated with the massive 1997-98 El Niño event are readily apparent. While erratic, as is typical of such precipitation metrics, there is no indication of a tendency to become more frequent over time.

Southeast heavy rainfall events

- The trend in average precipitation is positive and statistically significant in Mobile AL and Quitman GA but insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant in Mobile AL but insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant in Vicksburg MS and Norfolk VA but insignificant elsewhere.
- Averaged over all stations in the region none of these three trend parameters is statistically significant

Figure 6.4.3 shows the same calculation for the last 150 years in the Southeast humid zone. The temporal pattern of 5-day totals of the 1-in-5yr heavy events is generally unremarkable, though a cluster of higher values appears in 1995 to 2019. The increase in those years is due largely to the 4 northeastern-most stations of Wilmington NC, Weldon NC, Washington DC, and Norfolk VA. This confirms the pattern indicated in NCA4 and NCA5 -- an increasing frequency of heavy events due to a temporal clustering of tropical storms from eastern NC to Maine discussed below. Otherwise, the remaining 20 stations show an unremarkable temporal distribution of heavy events.

BOX: Perils of short data records

San Francisco provides a good case study of the limitation of using short historical samples to characterize natural variability of extreme events. Suppose we use a 130-year sample of daily San Francisco precipitation from 1895 to 2024 and we look for 3-day, 5-day, 14-day and 30-day rainfall records. The results are as shown in Table 7.2.

Event	Record (inches)	Year
3-day	6.94	2023
5-day	8.55	2023
14-day	12.62	2023
30-day	18.93	1998

Table 6.2: Extreme rainfall records, San Francisco, 1895-2024.

The records all cluster in the more recent years. 2023 appears to be an exceptional year and since it is near the end of the sample, it might suggest that the climate has shifted into a more hazardous state, perhaps because of human influences. Note: “2023” indicates the event occurred in the water-year of Aug 2022 to Jul 2023.

But the picture is very different if we use a sample that begins 45 years earlier, in 1850. Table 6.3 shows that the record-setting events all happened in the 1860s. Furthermore 2023 is now not even in 2nd place but falls to 3rd or 4th place. And comparing the records of the two charts shows the extreme precipitation events in 1862 and 1867 involved considerably more rainfall than the 1998 and 2023 events, with 14- and 30-day totals about 50 percent higher.

Event	Record (inches)	Year	Rank of 130-yr extreme listed in Table 6.2
3-day	8.85	1867	3
5-day	9.80	1867	3
14-day	19.05	1862	4
30-day	28.25	1862	2

Table 6.3: Extreme rainfall records, San Francisco, 1850-2024.

The range of natural variability is made even more remarkable when paleoclimate evidence is examined. Porter et al. (2011) discovered that in the past 1,800 years at least six megastorms were more intense than the devastating 1861-62 ARkStorm that struck the region. Evidently such extreme events, “unprecedented” in our 1895-2024 sample, have impacted the region about every 300 years, though not since 1895.

This example illustrates the limitations of using relatively short climate periods (~130 years) to assess the character and range of natural variability in general and of extreme events in particular. Accurate representation of the full range of natural variability is necessary for any attribution analyses (see 8.6). Infrastructure planners, emergency management institutions and attribution scientists would understand the significant mischaracterization of the magnitude of a future extreme if based only on the last 130 years. In this case, a single time-sample of 130 years provides an underestimation of the extreme value by up to 50 percent determined when adding only 45 more years of observations. Compared to millennial-scale paleoclimate evidence, an even greater underestimation would occur. An important lesson is that the climate can deliver great surprises on its own, even without human influences.

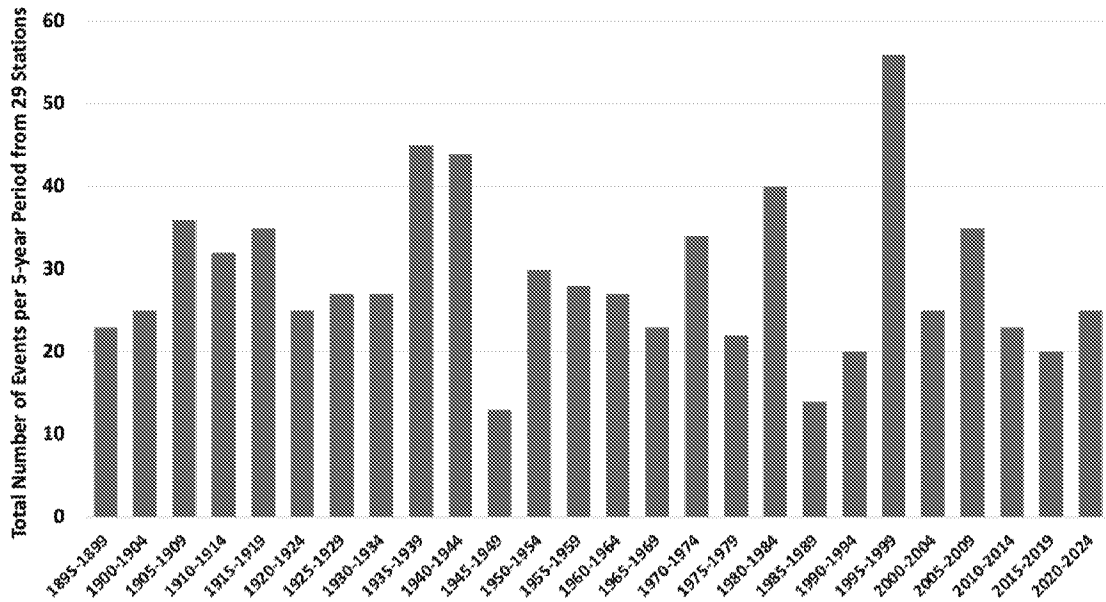


Figure 6.4.2. The time distribution by 5-year periods of the 26 heaviest (1-in-5 yr) occurrences for 29 stations on the Pacific coast.

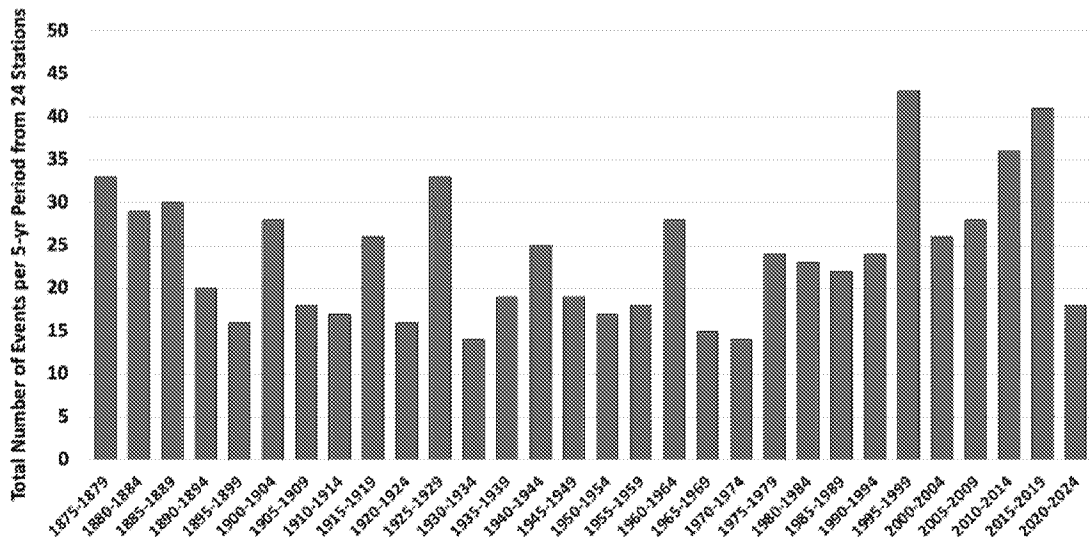


Figure 6.4.3. As in Fig. 6.4.2 but for the heaviest 30 (1-in-5yr) events for 24 stations in the humid Southeast from Austin TX to Washington DC in 5-year bins for 1875-2024.

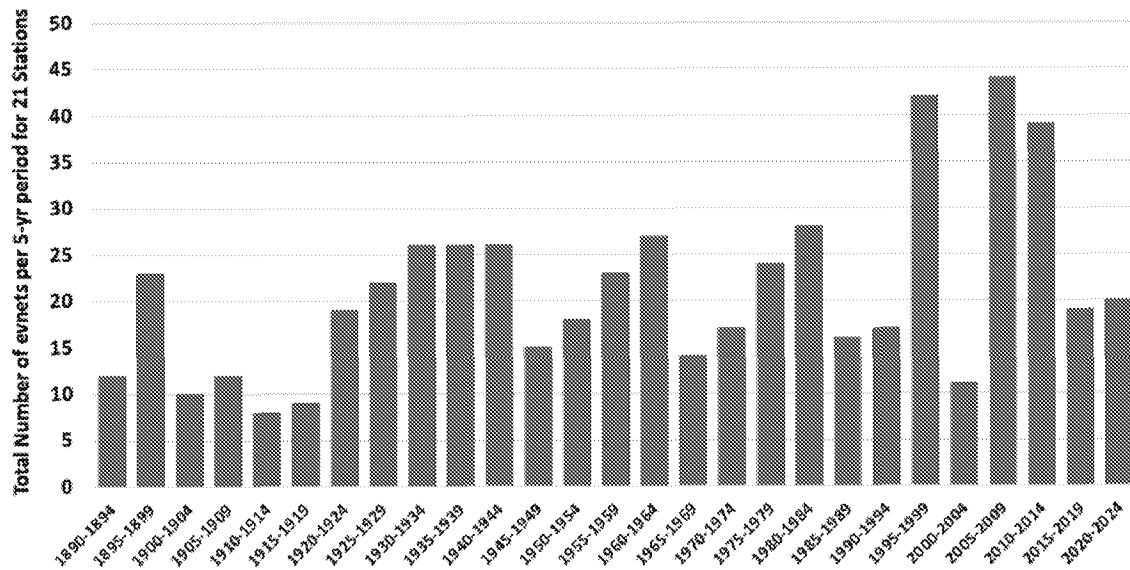


Figure 6.4.4. As in Fig. 6.4.2 but for the heaviest 27 (1-in-5yr) 3-day precipitation events for 27 Northeast stations from NY to ME, including Montreal.

Northeast heavy rainfall events

- The trend in average precipitation is positive and statistically significant in 12 of 27 locations and also in the regional average.
- The trend in rainfall variance is positive and significant in Portland ME, Albany NY, Buffalo NY and Eastport ME but insignificant elsewhere.
- The trend in daily maximum precipitation is positive and significant in Portland ME, Gardiner ME and Eastport ME but insignificant elsewhere.
- When averaged over all stations in the region, there is no statistically significant trend in either the precipitation variance or maximum

Fig. 6.4.4 shows the same calculation for the last 135 years in 27 stations in the Northeast (including Montreal Canada). We use 3-day totals here as this produced the largest temporal variations in time. In this region, 72 percent of events occur during June to October and are dominated by incursions of hurricanes, tropical storms, or tropical storms that transition to extratropical systems. According to NCA4 and NCA5 this region experienced the largest increases in extreme events, so it merits a closer examination.

There is a noticeable clustering of extreme events from 1995 to 2014. Howarth et al. (2019) examined a similar region as in Fig. 6.5.5 that includes PA and NJ and reported significant differences in various precipitation extremes between two 18-year periods, 1979-96 and 1997-2014. That included a 317 percent increase in 24-hr events exceeding 6 inches, while we find a 51 percent increase over the same years. However, Figure 6.5.5 shows that frequency drops sharply after 2014, returning to the long-term average in the subsequent 5-year intervals, again illustrating the perils of drawing conclusions from short-term trends in highly variable metrics.

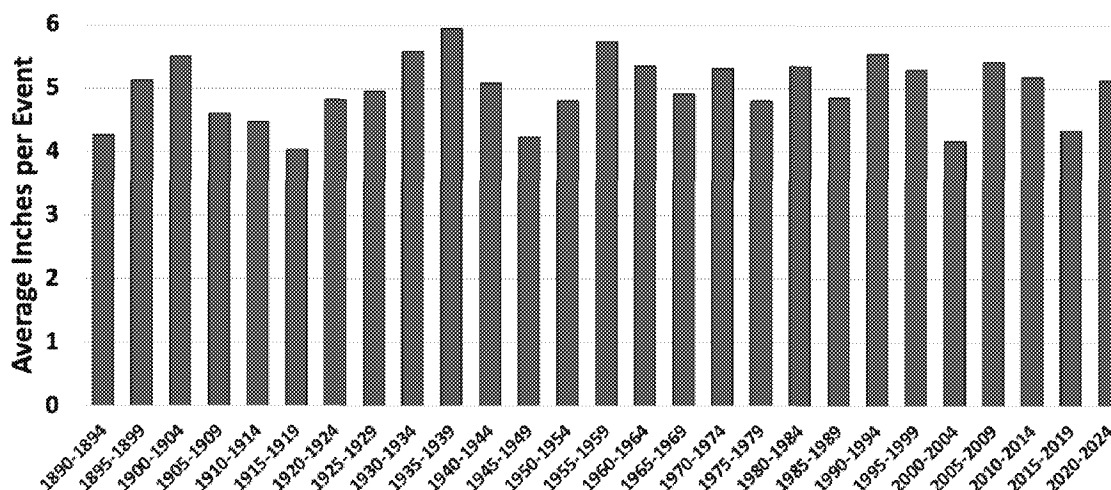


Figure 6.4.5. Average amount of precipitation falling in the 1-in-5yr events for the NE stations.

The high percentage increase in the Howarth *et al.* sample is associated with small numbers at relatively few locations: there were only 6 in the first period and 25 in the second across 58 stations. Most of the stations did not record such an event. If there is a region-wide increase in heavy events, it should be seen in the average across all stations. Figure 6.4.5 shows the average precipitation in the 1-in-5 yr events across the NE. The trend is only +0.02 inches/decade. The highest amount, 1935-39, includes the Great New England Hurricane of 1938, one of the rare major (Category 3 or higher) hurricanes to strike the region. The results in Figs. 6.4.4 and 6.4.5 thus suggest that though there was a surge in the number of events at a few locations during the 1995 to 2014 interval, there was no regional pattern and the change did not persist beyond 2014.

Jong *et al.* (2024) document the increase of tropical influences on precipitation events in the Northeast since 1959 and concluded, “The autumn extreme precipitation trend over the Northeast U.S. is primarily attributed to tropical cyclone-related events since the 1990s.” The question then becomes: was the temporal clustering of tropical systems in 1997-2014 which affected the Northeast a response to increasing GHGs? Jong *et al.* examined CMIP-6 model output which suggests that there will be fewer such systems in the 21st century but that the intensity of the rainfall events might increase. This conjecture is not seen in Fig. 6.4.5 where the amount-per-event has remained steady over the 135-year period.

There is some evidence to indicate the heaviest rainfall events may be redistributed due to the impact of urban infrastructure on the local weather (e.g., Pielke Sr. et al. 2011, Zhang et al. 2018, Yang et al. 2024). Yang et al. state “Cities that experience compact development tend to witness larger increases in extreme rainfall frequency over downtown than their rural surroundings, while the anomalies in extreme rainfall frequency diminish for cities with dispersed development.” While this is an important insight to consider, the effect on the specific stations used in this analysis is unknown, or at least not detectable in Fig. 6.4.5.

In summary, some U.S. regions show short-duration increases in extreme precipitation events, consistent with natural variability. But analysis of long term, nationwide historical records that considers the autocorrelation properties of precipitation data does not support the claim that extreme short-duration rainfall events are becoming more frequent or intense.

6.5 Tornadoes

AR6 assesses tornado trends in the U.S. as follows:

[O]bservational trends in tornadoes, hail, and lightning associated with severe convective storms are not robustly detected due to insufficient coverage of the long-term observations. There is *medium confidence* that the mean annual number of tornadoes in the USA has remained relatively constant. (Chapter 11, section 11.7.3, p. 1594)

The monitoring of weak tornadoes has changed over time. The growth of rural populations and the increasing ability to take video with hand-held devices has led to more frequent reports of weak tornadoes that produce minimal damage. In contrast, strong to violent tornadoes have been observed more consistently over time. Note that tornado strength is measured by the damage it produces, not by the visual appearance of the funnel. Limited real-time observational capabilities in earlier decades did not prevent identification because strong to violent tornadoes leave much more damage which will be assessed later even if the tornado itself was not observed. Since statistics began in 1950, there has been a substantial decrease (by about 50%) in the number of strong to violent tornadoes as shown in Fig. 6.6.1a.

To summarize, there is a noticeable downward trend in the number of severe tornadoes in the U.S. since 1950. After 1990 the number of weak tornadoes in the U.S. has remained roughly constant; data before that are incomplete due to limited monitoring.

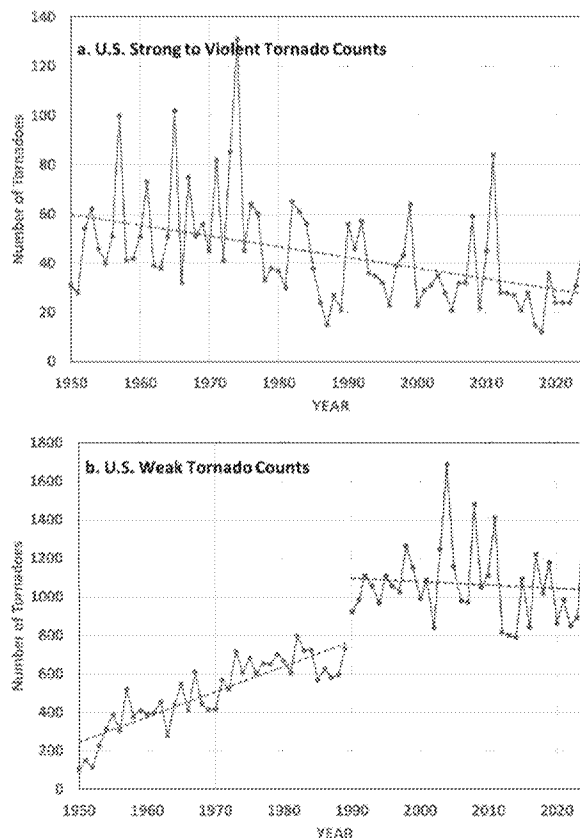


Figure 6.5.1. Annual U.S. tornado counts for (a) strong to violent tornadoes (EF3 to EF5), and (b) weak tornadoes (EF0 to EF2). Based upon NOAA Storms Prediction Center data, available at https://www.spc.noaa.gov/wcm/data/1950-2024_actual_tornadoes.csv

6.6 Flooding

Changes in floods were assessed as follows:

AR6: The SREX **assessed low confidence for observed changes in the magnitude or frequency of floods** at the global scale. This assessment was confirmed by the AR5 report. The SR15 found increases in flood frequency and extreme streamflow in some regions, but decreases in other regions. . . [H]ydrological literature on observed flood changes is heterogeneous, focusing at regional and sub-regional basin scales, making it difficult to synthesise at the global and sometimes regional scales. (Chapter 11.5)

AR6: [T]he seasonality of floods has changed in cold regions where snowmelt dominates the flow regime in response to warming (*high confidence*). Confidence about peak flow trends over past decades on the global scale is *low*. (Chapter 11.5)

NCA4: Trends in extreme high values of streamflow are **mixed** across the United States. Analysis of 200 U.S. stream gauges indicates areas of both increasing and decreasing flooding magnitude **but does not provide robust evidence** that these trends are attributable to human influences (pp. 240-241)

The absence of detectable US-wide trends in flooding is consistent with the findings in Section 6.4 of absence of coherent changes in extreme precipitation.

6.7 Droughts

Assessments of drought trends were as follows.

AR6: Few AR6 regions show observed increases in meteorological drought (Section 11.9, p. 1575),

AR6: Increasing trends in agricultural and ecological droughts have been observed on all continents (*medium confidence*), but decreases only in one AR6 region (*medium confidence*). Increasing trends in hydrological droughts have been observed in a few AR6 regions. (Chapter 11 Summary)

NCA4: As a consequence of this increased precipitation, **drought statistics over the entire CONUS have declined**. (p. 233)

NCA4: Recent droughts and associated heat waves have reached record intensity in some regions of the United States; however, by geographical scale and duration, the Dust Bowl era of the **1930s remains the benchmark** drought and extreme heat event in the historical record (very high confidence). (p.231)

SREX: From a paleoclimate perspective, **recent droughts are not unprecedented**, with severe ‘megadroughts’ reported in the paleoclimatic record for Europe, North America, and Australia. (p. 170)

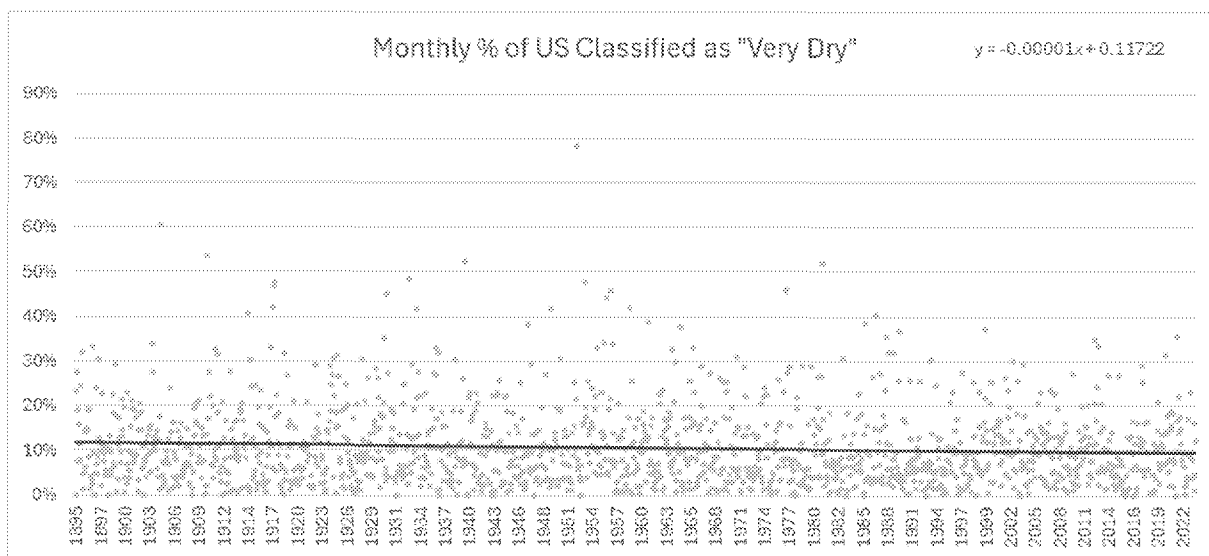


Figure 6.7.1: U.S. dryness (%) 1895—2023. Source: NOAA [[HYPERLINK "https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/uspa/wet-dry/0"](https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/uspa/wet-dry/0)]

As shown in Figure 6.7.1, U.S. long-term data shows an insignificantly declining trend in extreme dryness (-0.001 percent per year)

Kogan *et al.* (2020) examines a 38-year high-resolution satellite-based drought measure and concludes that global drought has not intensified and is not connected to climate change: “it is possible to state firmly that global and main grain countries’ drought area and intensity trends have not been following global climate warming since 1980’s.”

In summary there is no evidence of increasing drought frequency or intensity in the U.S. or globally over recent decades.

6.8 Wildfires

The IPCC has not provided an assessment of wildfires. As shown in Figure 6.8.1, global wildfire activity as measured by European Space Agency shows a downward trend in the 21st century.

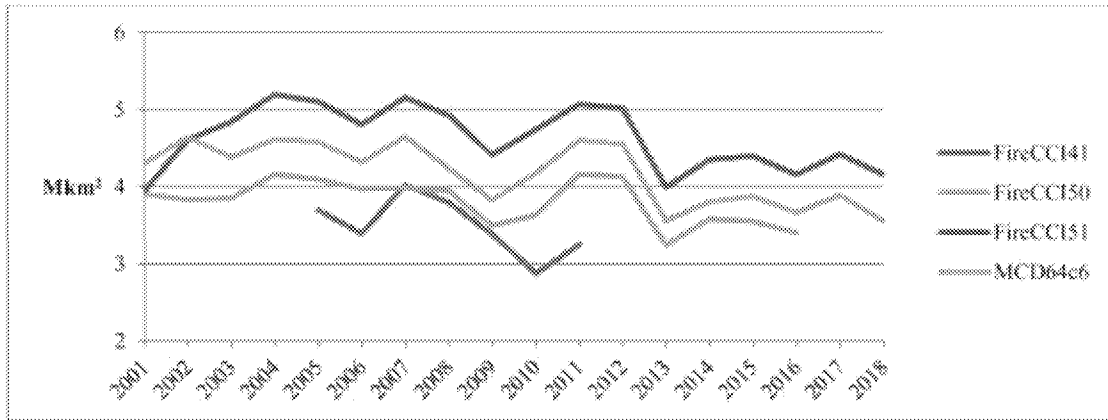


Figure 6.8.1: Global wildfire area 2001-2018. Source: From Lizundia-Loiola *et al.* (2021). The different coloured lines represent data products derived from different satellites and algorithms

Global data show that wildfire coverage is constant or declining on every continent (Samborska and Ritchie, 2024).

Active fire suppression since 1900 makes it difficult to establish a natural baseline for wildfire activity in the U.S. Paleoclimatic evidence indicates that past activity was much higher than today. Marlon *et al.* (2012) used sedimentary charcoal layers to reconstruct fire history of western U.S. for the past 1400 years and also fit a model to predict fire activity as a function of climatic conditions. Their results are summarized in Figure 6.8.2 below (from Figure 2 in their paper). There has been a growing wildfire deficit over the 20th century. In other words, however much fire was observed in the 20th century, it was less than what would have been observed in previous centuries based on the climatic conditions. Parks *et al.* (2025) likewise find that despite the recent increase in wildfire burn area in North America, a significant wildfire deficit remains relative to historical wildfire regimes.

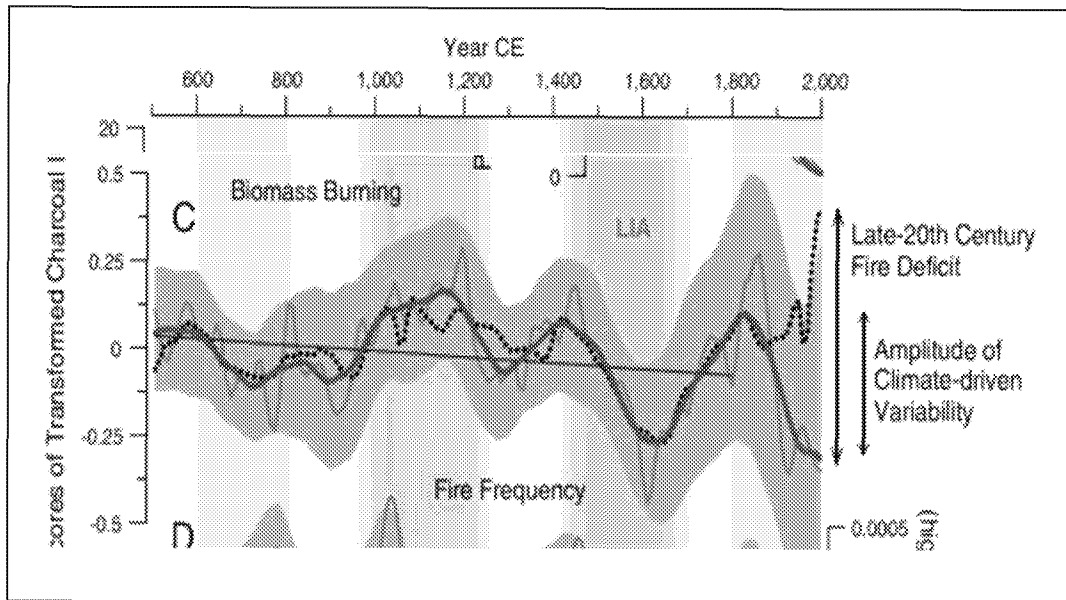


Figure 6.8.2 Fire frequency and fire deficit in the US. The red line shows the smoothed charcoal record and the black dotted line shows the predicted charcoal record based climatic conditions. Source: Marlon *et al.* (2012)

U.S. data from the National Interagency Fire Centre (NIFC) from 1926 to 2023 are shown in Figure 6.8.3. The NIFC has removed the pre-1960 data from its current website on the grounds that measurement methods changed after 1960 making the comparison unreliable. Nonetheless just focusing on the post-1985 interval the number of fires is not increasing. The area burned did increase but only until about 2007.

Forest fires have always been a part of nature, and they can certainly create conditions that are inhospitable in the short term for all life, including humans. Science has confirmed the overall benefit and necessity of forest fires. While recent high-profile fires and seasons serve as a reminder of the potential destructive impact, the highest profile U.S. forest fire remains the 1910 Big Blowup fire, which destroyed over three million acres and eliminated entire towns like Taft, MT (Apple, 2020). The 1910 fire reshaped the U.S. Forest Service (National Forest Foundation 2022) leading to a focus on fire suppression with a primary goal of defeating all forest fires (Forest History Society, 2022). This led to the “10 am rule” in 1935 requiring that all fires spotted on any day had to be controlled by 10 am the following day (National Forest Foundation, 2022).

While defeating all fires seemed a noble goal, questions began to arise as to whether this behavior “followed the science” (U.S. Forest Service, 2022). Over time the U.S. Forest Service has begun to rethink its goals, recognizing that new approaches such as prescribed burns, fuel elimination, and controlled wildfires are more appropriate (Sommer, 2016). Recent research is validating this approach and recognizing that more frequent smaller fires likely result in healthier forests, water ecosystems and biodiversity (Stephens *et al.*, 2021).

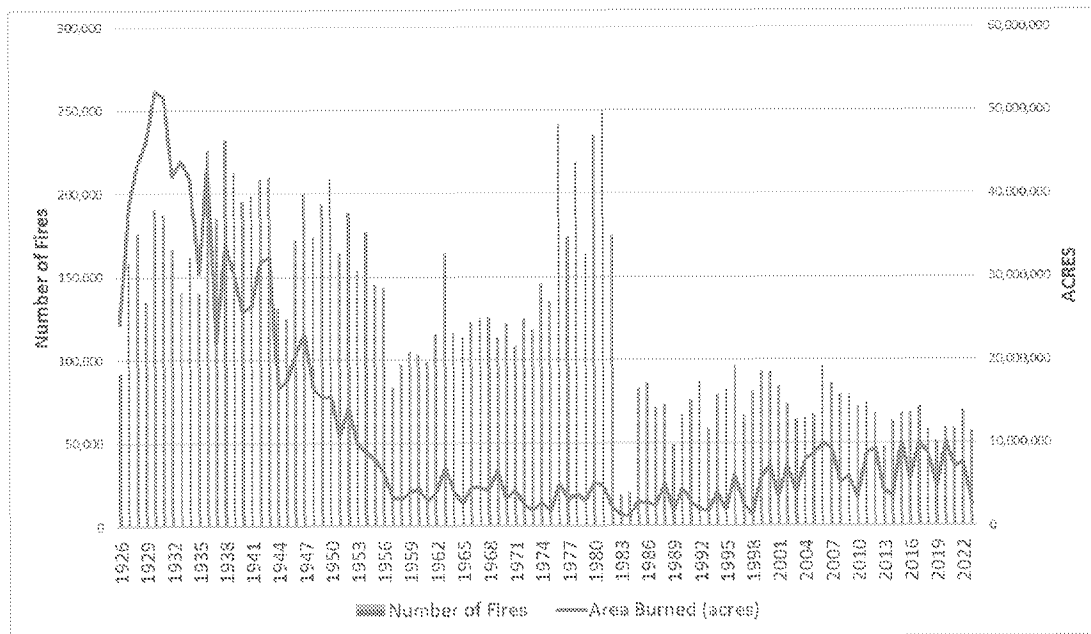


Figure 6.8.3: U.S. wildfires 1926 to 2023. Source: Post-2018: National InterAgency Fire Center data Pre-2017 webarchive.org.

References

- Apple, C. (2020, January 21). 1910 fire – The big burn across Montana and Idaho. *The Spokesman-Review*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2020/jan/19/1910-fire-big-burn-across-montana-and-idaho/>" \t "_new"]
- Bell, Gerald D. and Muthuvel Chelliah, "Leading Tropical Modes Associated with Interannual and Multidecadal Fluctuations in North Atlantic Hurricane Activity," *Journal of Climate* 19, no. 4 (February 15, 2006): 590–612, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/JCLI3659.1>"].
- Brewer, W. H. (1930). *Up and down California in 1860–1864: The journal of William H. Brewer*. University of California Press.
- Christy, J. R., Norris, W. B., and McNider, R. T. (2009). Surface temperature variations in East Africa and possible causes. *Journal of Climate*, 22(12), 3342–3356. <https://doi.org/10.1175/2008JCLI2726.1>
- Cohn, T. A. and Lins, H. F. (2005). Nature's style: Naturally trendy. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 32(23). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2005GL024476>" \t "_new"]
- Colorado State University. (2025). *Realtime tropical cyclone guidance*. [HYPERLINK "<https://tropical.atmos.colostate.edu/Realtime/index.php>" \t "_new"]
- Forest History Society (2022). *The 1910 fires*. [HYPERLINK "<https://foresthistory.org/research-explore/us-forest-service-history/policy-and-law/fire-u-s-forest-service/famous-fires/the-1910-fires/>" \t "_new"]
- Gershunov, A., and K. Guirguis (2012). California heat waves in the present and future. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 39(18). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2012GL052979>" \t "_new"]
- Gershunov, A., T. Shulgina, F.M. Ralph, D.A. Lavers J.J. and Rutz (2017). Assessing the climate-scale variability of atmospheric rivers affecting western North America. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 44(15), 7900–7908. <https://doi.org/10.1002/2017GL074175>

- Goldenberg, Stanley *et al.*, “The Recent Increase in Atlantic Hurricane Activity: Causes and Implications,” *Science* 293, no. 5529 (July 20, 2001): 474–479, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1060040>.
- Howarth, M. E., C.D. Thorncroft, and L.F. Bosart (2019). Changes in extreme precipitation in the Northeast United States: 1979–2014. *Journal of Hydrometeorology*, 20(4), 673–689. <https://doi.org/10.1175/JHM-D-18-0155.1>
- Hurst, H. E. (1951). Long term storage capacities of reservoirs. *Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers*, 116, 776–808.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). (2021). *Climate change 2021: The physical science basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (V. Masson-Delmotte *et al.*, Eds.). Cambridge University Press. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>" \t "_new"]
- Jong, B.-T., H. Murakami, T.L. Delworth and W.F. Cooke (2024). Contributions of tropical cyclones and atmospheric rivers to extreme precipitation trends over the Northeast US. *Earth's Future*, 12, e2023EF004370. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2023EF004370>" \t "_new"]
- Karl, T. R., C.N. Williams Jr., F.T. Quinlan, and T.A. Boden (1990). *United States Historical Climatology Network (HCN) serial temperature and precipitation data* (Publication No. 3404). Oak Ridge National Laboratory.
- Klotzbach, Phil *et al.* (2018) Continental U.S. Hurricane Landfall Frequency and Associated Damage: Observations and Future Risks, *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 99, no. 7 (July 2018): 1359–1376, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/BAMS-D-17-0184.1>"].
- Kogan, Feliz, Wei Guob and Wenze Yang (2020) “Near 40-year drought trend during 1981-2019 earth warming and food security” *Geomatics, Natural Hazards and Risk* Vol 11(1)
- Koutsoyiannis, D. (2013) Hydrology and Change. *Hydrological Sciences Journal* 58(6) [HYPERLINK "<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02626667.2013.804626>"]
- Markonis, Y., and D. Koutsoyiannis (2016). Scale-dependence of persistence in precipitation records. *Nature Climate Change*, 6, 399–401. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2894>
- Marlon, Jennifer, Patrick J Bartlein, Daniel G. Gavin *et al.* (2012) Long-term perspective on wildfires in the western USA *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* February 14 2012 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.pnas.org/doi/pdf/10.1073/pnas.1112839109>"]
- Maue, R. N. (2025). *Climatlas: Tropical cyclones*. [HYPERLINK "<https://climatlas.com/tropical/>" \t "_new"]
- McKittrick, R., and J.R. Christy (2019). Assessing changes in US regional precipitation on multiple time scales. *Journal of Hydrology*, 578, 124074. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhydrol.2019.124074>" \t "_new"]
- McKittrick, R., and J.R. Christy (2025), “Data and Code for DoE Report 2025”, Mendeley Data, V1, doi: 10.17632/8n9ks93vn7.1
- Null, J. and J. Hulbert, “California Washed Away: The Great Flood of 1862,” *Weatherwise* 60, no. 1 (2007): 26–30, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3200/wewi.60.1.26-30>"]
- National Forest Foundation. (2022). *Blazing battles: The 1910 fire and its legacy*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nationalforests.org/our-forests/your-national-forests-magazine/blazing-battles-the-1910-fire-and-its-legacy>" \t "_new"]
- National Interagency Fire Center. (2024). *Wildfire statistics*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/statistics/wildfires>" \t "_new"]
- NCA4. (2017). *Climate science special report: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume I* (D. J. Wuebbles, D. W. Fahey, and K. A. Hibbard, Eds.). U.S. Global Change Research Program. <https://doi.org/10.7930/J0J964J6>
- NCA5. (2023). *Fifth National Climate Assessment* (A. R. Crimmins *et al.*, Eds.). U.S. Global Change Research Program. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH1>" \t "_new"]

- NOAA Hurricane Research Division. (2025a). *All U.S. hurricanes (1851–2019)*. [HYPERLINK "https://www.aoml.noaa.gov/hrd/hurdat/All_U.S._Hurricanes.html" \t "_new"]
- NOAA Hurricane Research Division. (2025b). *Most intense (3, 4, 5) continental United States hurricanes: 1851–1970, and 1983–2023*. [HYPERLINK "https://www.aoml.noaa.gov/hrd/hurdat/most_intense.html" \t "_new"]
- Overland, J. E. (2021). Causes of the record-breaking Pacific Northwest heatwave, late June 2021. *Atmosphere*, 12(11), 1434. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3390/atmos12111434>" \t "_new"]
- Pan, M., M. Lu and U. Lall (2024). Diversity of cross-Pacific atmospheric river main routes. *Communications Earth and Environment*, 5, 378. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01552-y>" \t "_new"]
- Parks, Sean, Christopher Guiterman, Ellis Margolis *et al.* (2025) A fire deficit persists across diverse North American forests despite recent increases in area burned. *Nature Communications* 16 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-025-56333-8>"]
- Pielke, R. A., *et al.* (2011). Land use/land cover changes and climate: Modeling analysis and observational evidence. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 2, 828–850. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.144>
- Porter, K., *et al.* (2011). *Overview of the ARkStorm scenario*. U.S. Geological Survey.
- Quinlan, F. T., T. R. Karl, and C.N. Williams Jr. (1987). *United States Historical Climatology Network (USHCN) serial temperature and precipitation data* (NDP-019). Oak Ridge National Laboratory.
- Seneviratne, S. *et al.* (2021) “Chapter 11: Weather and Climate Extreme Events in a Changing Climate.” In *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, edited by V. Masson-Delmotte, P. Zhai, A. Pirani, S.L. Connors, C. Péan, S. Berger, N. Caud, *et al.*, 1513–1766. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157896.013>.
- Samborska, V., and H. Ritchie (2024). Wildfires. *Our World in Data*. [HYPERLINK "<https://ourworldindata.org/wildfires>" \t "_new"]
- Sommer, L. (2016, November 7). Let it burn: The Forest Service wants to stop putting out some fires. *KQED*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.kqed.org/science/1134217/let-it-burn-the-forest-service-wants-to-stop-putting-out-some-fires>" \t "_new"]
- Stephens, Scott *et al.*, (2021) “Fire, Water, and Biodiversity in the Sierra Nevada: A Possible Triple Win,” *Environmental Research Communications* 3, no. 8 (August 6, 2021): p. 081004, <https://doi.org/10.1088/2515-7620/ac17e2>.
- U.S. Forest Service. (2022). *Managing fire*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.fs.usda.gov/science-technology/fire>" \t "_new"]
- USGCRP. (2023). *USGCRP indicators platform: Heat waves*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves>" \t "_new"]
- Vecchi, Gabriel A. and Thomas R. Knutson (2011) “Estimating Annual Numbers of Atlantic Hurricanes Missing from the HURDAT Database (1878–1965) Using Ship Track Density,” *Journal of Climate* 24, no. 6 (2011): 1736–1746, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1175/2010JCLI3810.1>"].
- Villarini, Gabriele, Gabriel A. Vecchi, and James A. Smith, “U.S. Landfalling and North Atlantic Hurricanes: Statistical Modeling of Their Frequencies and Ratios,” *Monthly Weather Review* 140, no. 1 (January 2012): 44–65, <https://doi.org/10.1175/MWR-D-11-00063.1>.
- Web Archive. (n.d.). *Archive of NIFC fire data*. [HYPERLINK "https://web.archive.org/web/20200212033452/https://www.nifc.gov/fireInfo/fireInfo_stats_totalFires.html" \t "_new"]

- Yang, L., Y. Yang, Y. Shen, *et al.* (2024). Urban development pattern's influence on extreme rainfall occurrences. *Nature Communications*, 15, 3997. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-48533-5" \t "_new"](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-48533-5)]
- Zhang, W., G. Villarini, G.A. Vecchi, and J.A. Smith, J. A. (2018). Urbanization exacerbated the rainfall and flooding caused by Hurricane Harvey in Houston. *Nature*, 563, 384–388. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-018-0676-z"](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-018-0676-z)]

7 CHANGES IN SEA LEVEL

Chapter Summary

Since 1900, global average sea level has risen by about 8 inches. Sea level change along U.S. coasts is highly variable, associated with local variations in processes that contribute to sinking and also with ocean circulation patterns. The largest sea level rise along U.S. coasts are Galveston, New Orleans, and the Chesapeake Bay regions - each of these locations is associated with substantial local land sinking (subsidence) unrelated to climate change.

Extreme projections of global sea level rise are associated with an implausible extreme emissions scenario and inclusion of poorly understood processes associated with hypothetical ice sheet instabilities. In evaluating the IPCC AR6 projections to 2050 (with reference to the baseline period 1995-2014), almost half of the sea level rise has already occurred by 2025 and at a lower rate than predicted. U.S. tide gauge measurements shown herein reveal no obvious acceleration beyond the historical average rate of sea level rise.

7.1 Global sea level rise

Global sea level rise is arguably the most important climate impact driver that is unambiguously associated with increasing temperatures. At the global level, warming raises sea level through thermal expansion of sea water and through melting of glaciers and ice sheets. Variations in land water storage are another important factor. At the regional scale, sea level change is influenced by large-scale ocean circulation patterns, and geologic processes and deformation from the redistribution of ice and water. Locally, vertical land motion from geologic processes, ground water withdrawal, and fossil fuel extraction are also important.

The IPCC AR6 estimates that global mean sea level increased by 7.9 (5.9–9.8) inches between 1901 and 2018, with the rate of sea level rise accelerating in recent decades. At the ocean basin scale, sea levels have risen fastest in the Western Pacific and slowest in the Eastern Pacific over the period 1993–2018 (Fox-Kemper *et al.*, 2021). The rate of global sea level rise is estimated to be 0.12 inches/year (about the height of two stacked pennies) (NASA, 2020).

The observing systems for global sea level rise have advanced significantly in the satellite era, particularly with the advent of satellite altimeters in 1993. Local tide gauges have provided useful data for the past century, and even longer for a few locations. Following the end of the Little Ice Age in the mid-nineteenth century, tide gauges show that the global mean sea level began rising during the period 1820–1860, well before most anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions.

7.2 U.S. sea level rise

Observed and predicted rates of mean global sea level rise might have little scientific relevance for specific locations, owing to local processes (NOAA, 2025). Figure 7.1 shows that in Canada and Alaska (and also northern Washington), sea level is decreasing, owing to uplift from glacial rebound. Most of the Pacific coast tide gauges show rises between 0.12 inches/year, while largest U.S. rates are on the Gulf coast (Louisiana and Texas) and in the mid-Atlantic states (Chesapeake Bay region).

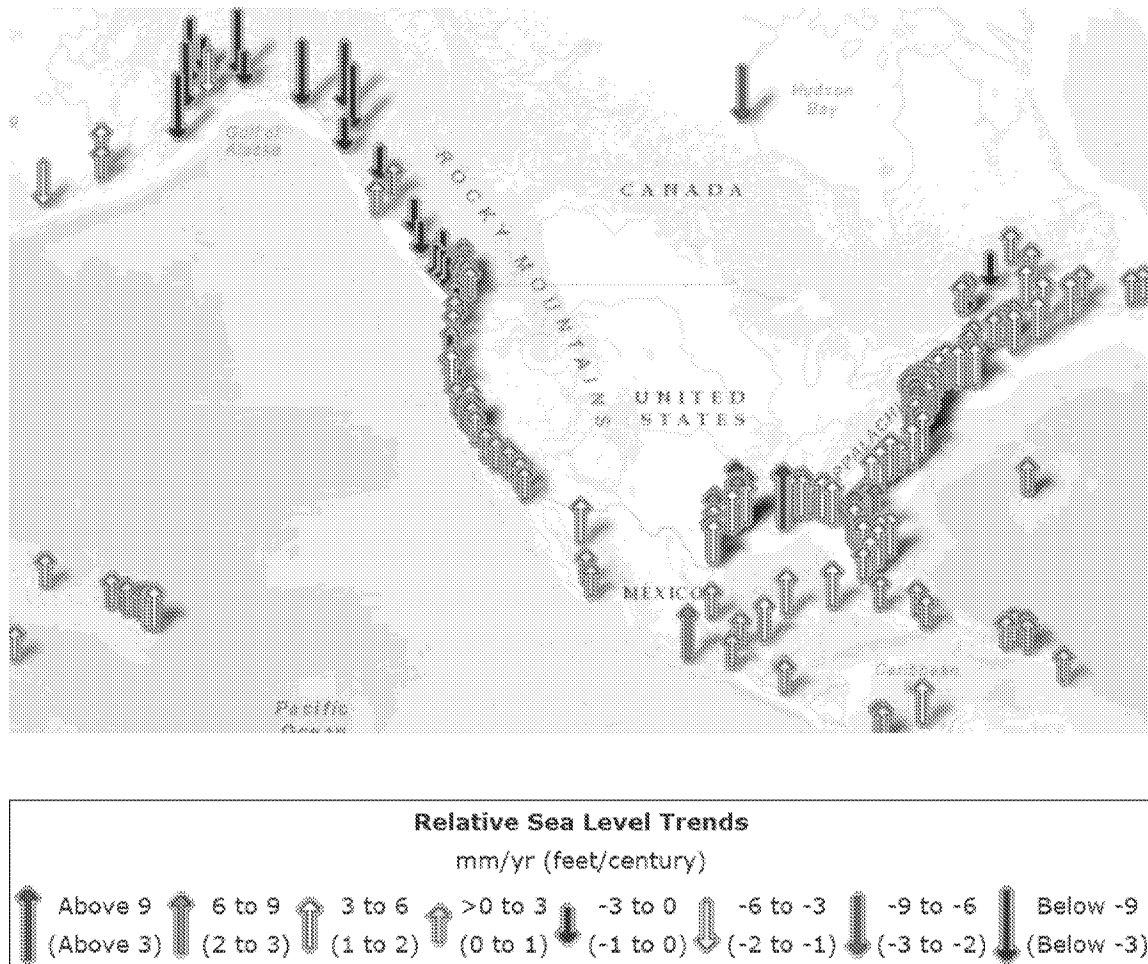


Figure 7.1. Map of rates of relative sea level rise along the U.S. coast (NOAA, <https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/sltrends/>). For reference, 3 mm = 0.12 in.

Measurements of relative sea level rise from tide gauges conflate the climatologically relevant increase in the volume of seawater with local vertical land motion. The latter, which varies from place to place, is best measured using a Global Positioning System (GPS) station located near the tide gauge. It is driven by a range of processes that can be comparable to the climate signal and can locally exacerbate (subsidence/sinking) or mitigate (uplift) the risk of sea level rise (Wöppelmann and Marcos, 2016). Human activities triggering subsidence are often significant. They include soil drainage (e.g. for urban development purposes) and subsurface extraction of groundwater or hydrocarbons.

Table 7.1 shows absolute sea-level rise (ASLR) for selected locations, determined from the sum of uncorrected sea-level rise as estimated from tide gauge time series (RSLR) (NOAA, 2025) and the vertical land motion (VLM) measurements (NAS, 2012; Letetrel *et al.*, 2015; Karegar *et al.*, 2016). The absolute sea level rise for each of these locations is significantly smaller than the measured relative sea level rise owing to local subsidence. More than half of the measured relative sea level rise is attributed to land sinking for these locations: San Francisco, Galveston, Grand Isle. For reference, the global average rate of absolute sea level rise is estimated to be 0.12 inches/year.

Location	RSLR	VLM	ASLR
San Francisco, CA	+0.08	-0.06	+0.02
Galveston, TX	+0.26	-0.19	+0.07
Grand Isle, LA	+0.36	-0.28	+0.08
St Petersburg, FL	+0.12	-0.02	+0.10
New York City, NY	+0.11	-0.05	+0.06

Table 7.1 Absolute sea level rise (inches/year) consisting of Relative Sea Level Rise (RSLR) plus Vertical Land Motion (VLM)

San Francisco Bay

Over the past 100 years, relative sea level in the San Francisco Bay area has risen by 7.8 inches, at an average rate of 0.08 inches/year (Figure 7.2). As shown in Table 7.1, San Francisco’s vertical land motion is -0.06 inches/year (sinking), producing a recent absolute rate of +0.02 inches/year. Portions of Treasure Island, San Francisco International Airport, and Foster City are sinking as fast as 0.4 inches/year (Shirzaei and Bürgmann, 2018). Problems in the San Francisco Bay area, including threats to the airport, are caused primarily by soil compaction in landfill zones that were formerly wetlands, not by the slow creep of global sea level rise.

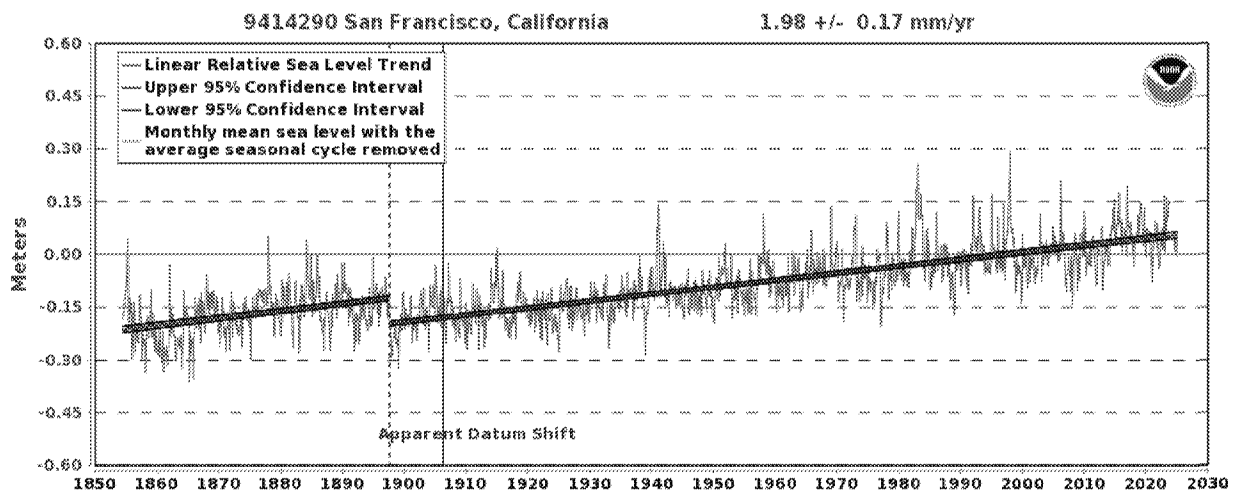


Figure 7.2. Tide gauge measurements at San Francisco, California, obtained from NOAA - https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/sltrends/sltrends_station.shtml?id=9414290 (downloaded 4/22/25).

Galveston - Houston

Long-term tide measurements at Galveston Pier 21 show sea level rise of 2.18 feet in the past century, or a rate of 0.26 inches/year (Figure 7.3). Vertical land motion (subsidence) at Galveston is estimated at -0.19 inches/year, yielding an absolute rate of rise of +0.07 inches/year (Table 7.1). The U.S. Geologic Survey found that most of the land-surface subsidence in the Houston-Galveston region is a direct result of groundwater withdrawals (Kasmarek and Ramage 2017), which caused compaction of the aquifer sediments, mostly in the fine-grained silt and clay layers. By 1979, as much as 10 feet of subsidence had occurred in Houston.

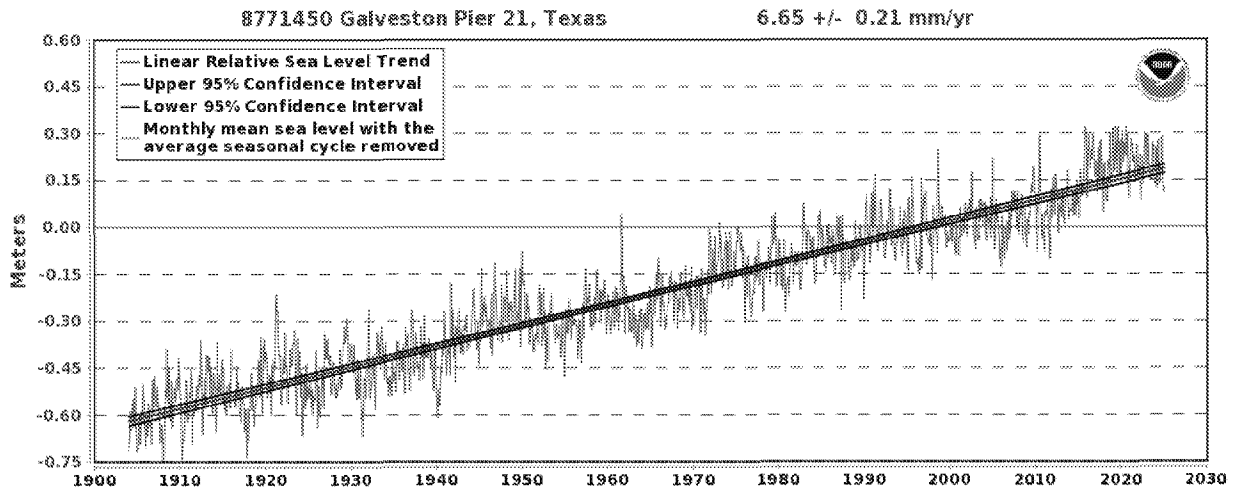


Figure 7.3. Tide gauge measurements Galveston Pier, TX, obtained from NOAA - https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/sltrends/sltrends_station.shtml?id=8771450 (downloaded 4/22/2025).

New Orleans and the Mississippi delta

Long-term tide gauge measurements at Grand Isle, Louisiana, show that sea level has risen by slightly more than 3 feet over the last 100 years at an average rate of 0.36 inches/year (Figure 7.4). Vertical land motion (subsidence) is estimated -0.28 inches/year. Table 7.1 gives the absolute sea level rise as +0.08 inches/year.

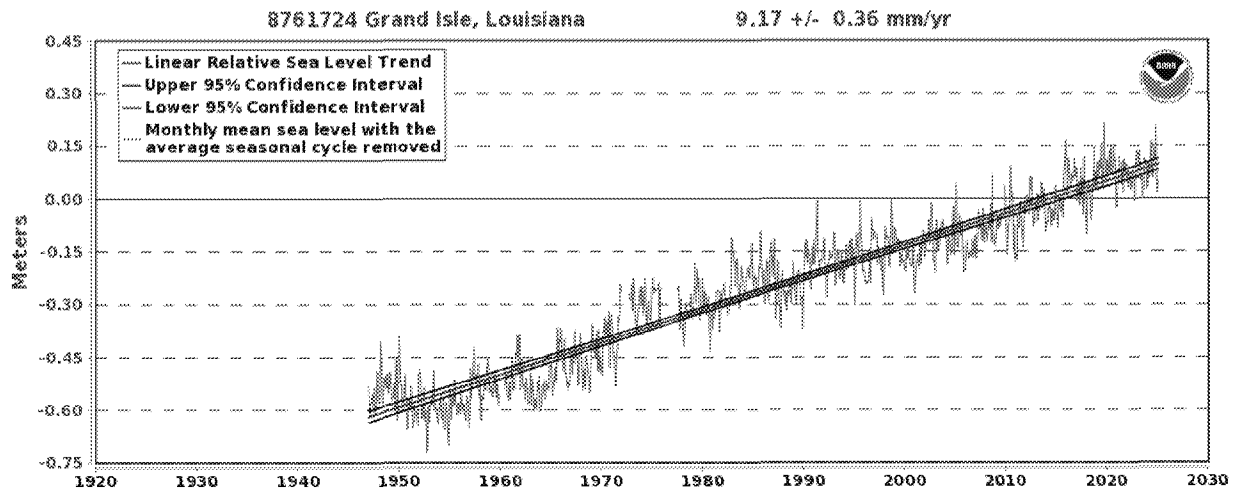


Figure 7.4. Tide gauge measurements at Grand Isle, LA, obtained from NOAA - https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/sltrends/sltrends_station.shtml?id=8761724 (downloaded 4/22/25).

The issues of sea level rise and land loss in the Mississippi Delta region are complex, with geological subsidence and the decline in sediment transported by the Mississippi river being the dominant drivers. The construction of dams in the basin since the 1950s has decreased the Mississippi's suspended sediment load by ~50 percent (Maloney 2018). A new subsidence map of coastal Louisiana finds the coastal region to be sinking at about one third of an inch per year (Neinhuis *et al.* 2017), associated with groundwater and resource withdrawal. As the city's elevation averages one to two feet *below* sea level, sea level rise from anthropogenic warming is hardly the dominant driver of New Orleans' problems.

New York City

New York City is particularly vulnerable to the effects of sea level rise because it is built primarily on islands and has 520 miles of coastline. Measurements by a tide gauge at the southern tip of Manhattan (The Battery) show that relative sea level has risen over 11 inches over the past century, at an average rate of 0.11 inches/year (Figure 7.5). But vertical land motion in the New York City area is -0.05 inches/year (roughly 5 inches per century), so that the absolute rate of sea level rise at The Battery is 0.06 inches/year, or about 55 percent of the measured relative sea level rise.

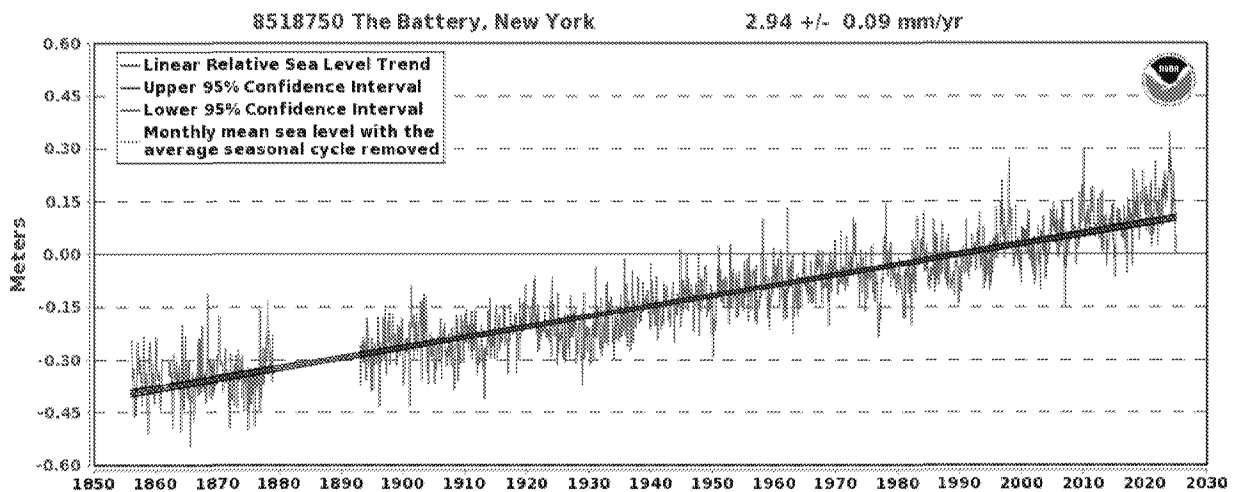


Figure 7.5. Tide gauge measurements at The Battery, New York, obtained from NOAA - https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/sltrends/sltrends_station.shtml?id=8518750 (downloaded 4/22/25).

7.3 Projected sea level rise

The concern over sea level rise is not about the roughly 8 inches of global rise since 1900. Rather, it is about projections of *accelerated* rise based upon simulations of a warming climate through the 21st Century.

The IPCC AR6 finds *high agreement* across published global mean sea level projections for 2050 with little sensitivity to emissions scenarios. Considering only projections incorporating ice-sheet processes in whose quantification there is at least *medium confidence*, the global sea level projections for 2050, across all emissions scenarios, fall between 3.94 and 15.75 inches (5th–95th percentile *very likely* range) relative to the 1995–2014 baseline period (Fox-Kemper *et al.*, 2021).

Conversely, AR6 states there is *low agreement* across published global mean sea level projections for 2100, particularly for higher emissions scenarios. Considering only projections representing ice sheet processes in whose quantification there is at least *medium confidence*, the AR6 global mean sea level projections for 2100 lie between 7.87 and 39.37 inches (5th–95th percentile *very likely* range) under the medium emissions scenario SSP2–4.5 (Fox-Kemper *et al.*, 2021). There is deep uncertainty surrounding projections of sea level rise to 2100 owing to uncertainties in ice sheet instabilities, particularly for the higher emissions scenarios.

In evaluating the IPCC AR6 projections to 2050 (with reference to the baseline period 1995–2014), almost half of the sea level rise has already occurred by 2025. From the tide gauge measurements in Figures 7.2–7.5, there is little to no obvious acceleration in sea level rise beyond the historical average rate.

In February 2022, NOAA issued its projections of sea level rise for various sites along the U.S. coast (Sweet *et al.*, 2022). They claim that by 2050, the sea will have risen one foot at The Battery in Manhattan. A one-foot rise in thirty years would be more than twice the current rate and about three times the average rate over the past century. In that historical context, NOAA’s projection is remarkable—as shown in Figure 7.6, it would require a dramatic acceleration beyond anything observed since the early 20th century. But even more noteworthy is that they say this rise is “locked in”—it will happen no matter what future emissions are. We should know in a decade or so whether that prediction has legs.

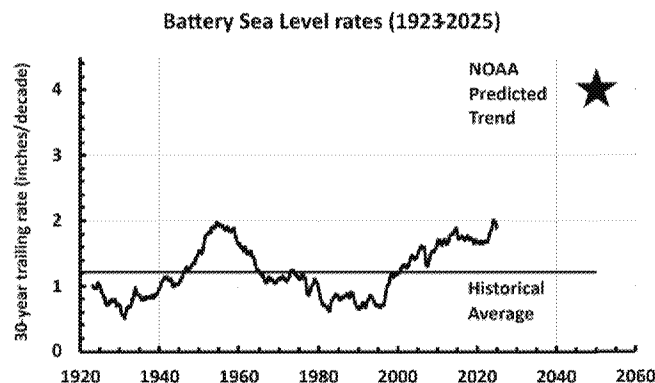


Figure 7.6 Rate of sea level rise at the Battery in Manhattan. Shown is the historical thirty-year trailing trend, together with the allegedly “locked in” NOAA predicted trend for 2050. Historical data: NOAA Tides and Current.

References

Fox-Kemper, B., Hewitt, H. T., Xiao, C., Adalgeirsdóttir, G., Drijfhout, S. S., Edwards, T. L., ... & Yu, Y. (2021). Ocean, cryosphere and sea level change. In *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (pp. 1211–1362). Geneva, Switzerland: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

- Karegar, M. A., Dixon, T. H., & Engelhart, S. E. (2016). Subsidence along the Atlantic Coast of North America: Insights from GPS and late Holocene relative sea level data. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 43(7), 3126–3133. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1002/2016GL068015>" \t "_new"]
- Kasmarek, M. C., & Ramage, J. K. (2017). *Water-level altitudes 2017 and water-level changes in the Chicot, Evangeline, and Jasper aquifers and compaction 1973–2016 in the Chicot and Evangeline aquifers, Houston-Galveston Region, Texas* (Scientific Investigations Report 2017–5080). U.S. Geological Survey. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3133/sir20175080>" \t "_new"]
- Letetrel, C., Becker, M., Llovel, W., & Cazenave, A. (2015). Estimation of vertical land movement rates along the coasts of the Gulf of Mexico over the past decades. *Continental Shelf Research*, 111(Part A), 42–51. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.csr.2015.10.018>" \t "_new"]
- Maloney, J. M., Bentley, S. J., Xu, K., Obelcz, J., Georgiou, I. Y., & Miner, M. D. (2018). Mississippi River subaqueous delta is entering a stage of retrogradation. *Marine Geology*, 400, 12–23. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.margeo.2018.03.001>" \t "_new"]
- National Academy of Science (NAS, 2012). *Sea-level rise for the coasts of California, Oregon and Washington: Past, present, and future*. Appendix A: Vertical land motion and sea-level data along the West Coast of the United States. National Academies Press.
<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/13389/sea-level-rise-for-the-coasts-of-california-oregon-and-washington>
- NASA. (2020). *NASA sea level rise portal: 2020 edition*. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nasa.gov/specials/sea-level-rise-2020/>" \t "_new"]
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services. (n.d.). *Sea level trends*. [HYPERLINK "<https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/sltrends/>" \t "_new"]
- NOAA Tides & Currents. (n.d.). *Relative sea level trends*. [HYPERLINK "<https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/sltrends/>" \t "_new"]
- Nienhuis, J. H., Törnqvist, T. E., Esposito, C. R., Liang, M., & Ma, H. (2017). A new subsidence map for coastal Louisiana. *GSA Today*, 27(6), 28–29. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1130/GSATG337GW.1>" \t "_new"]
- Shirzaei, M., & Bürgmann, R. (2018). Global climate change and local land subsidence exacerbate inundation risk to the San Francisco Bay Area. *Science Advances*, 4(3), eaap9234. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aap9234>" \t "_new"]
- Sweet, W. V., Hamlington, B. D., Kopp, R. E., et al. (2022). *Global and regional sea level rise scenarios for the United States* (USGS Report 70229139). United States Geological Survey. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.usgs.gov/publications/global-and-regional-sea-level-rise-scenarios-united-states>" \t "_new"]
- Wöppelmann, G., & Marcos, M. (2016). Vertical land motion as a key to understanding sea level change and variability. *Reviews of Geophysics*, 54, 64–92. <https://doi.org/10.1002/2015RG000502>

8 UNCERTAINTIES IN CLIMATE CHANGE ATTRIBUTION

Chapter summary

“Attribution” refers to identifying the cause of some aspect of climate change, specifically with reference to anthropogenic activity. There is an ongoing scientific debate around attribution methods, particularly regarding extreme weather events. Attribution is made difficult by high natural variability, the relatively small expected anthropogenic signal, lack of high-quality data, and reliance on deficient climate models. The IPCC has long cautioned that methods to establish causality in climate science are inherently uncertain and ultimately depend on expert judgement.

Substantive criticism of the main IPCC assessments of the role of CO₂ in recent warming focus on inadequate assessment of natural climate variability, uncertainties in measurement of solar variability and in aerosol forcing, and problems in the statistical methods used for attribution.

The IPCC does not in general make attribution claims for most climate impact drivers related to extreme events. Statements related to statistics of global extremes (e.g. event probability or return times, magnitude and frequency) are not generally considered accurate owing to data limitations and are made with low confidence. Attribution of individual extreme weather events is challenging due to their rarity. Conflicting claims about the causes of the 2021 Western North America Heatwave illustrate the perils of hasty attribution claims about individual extreme events.

8.1 Introduction

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) distinguishes between detection of climate change and attribution of its cause. As defined by the IPCC AR6 WGI Glossary (IPCC, 2025):

Detection: Detection of change is defined as the process of demonstrating that climate or a system affected by climate has changed in some defined statistical sense, without providing a reason for that change. An identified change is detected in observations if its likelihood of occurrence by chance due to internal variability alone is determined to be small, for example, <10%.

Attribution: Attribution is defined as the process of evaluating the relative contributions of multiple causal factors to a change or event with a formal assessment of confidence.

Both steps rely on statistical analysis. Detection focuses on whether changes are significant enough to stand out from random variation regardless of cause. Attribution involves comparison of observed events to model-generated counterfactuals. Since experimentation on the climate is not possible, attribution requires statistical inference to assess how much human activities, such as GHG emissions, versus natural factors, like volcanic eruptions, contribute to observed changes. Attribution methods assume all external and internal drivers of the system are known and represented.

There are ongoing scientific debates around attribution methods, especially those for attributing extreme weather events to climate change. The IPCC has long cautioned that methods to establish causality in climate science are inherently uncertain and ultimately depend on expert judgement. AR4 Working Group I (Hegerl *et al.*, 2007) explained it as follows:

‘Attribution’ of causes of climate change is the process of establishing the most likely causes for the detected change with some defined level of confidence... unequivocal attribution would require controlled experimentation with the climate system. Since that is not possible, in practice attribution of anthropogenic climate change is understood to mean demonstration that a detected change is ‘consistent with the estimated responses to the given combination of anthropogenic and natural forcing’ and ‘not consistent with alternative, physically plausible explanations of recent climate change that exclude important elements of the given combination of forcings’ (IPCC, 2001)... The approaches used in detection and attribution research described above cannot fully account for all uncertainties, and thus ultimately expert judgement is required to give a calibrated assessment of whether a specific cause is responsible for a given climate change.

AR5 Working Group II (Cramer *et al.*, 2014) makes the following statement:

Two broad challenges to the detection and attribution of climate change impacts relate to observations and process understanding. On the observational side, high-quality, long-term data relating to natural and human systems and the multiple factors affecting them are rare. In addition, the detection and attribution of climate change impacts requires an understanding of the processes by which climate change, in conjunction with other factors, may affect the system in question.

Because of the complexity of the causal chains in the climate system, investigation of these relationships is exceptionally challenging.

8.2 Attribution methods

The IPCC employs several attribution methods to assess the causes of observed climate changes, distinguishing between natural and human-induced factors. Below is a concise description of the key IPCC attribution methods.

Optimal Fingerprinting uses linear regression to explain variations in observed climate data as a weighted sum of climate model simulations run with and without anthropogenic forcings. The data used in the regression model is weighted to try to minimize the influence of random noise and the estimation method is chosen to account for climate model error.

Time Series Analysis exploits statistical differences between anthropogenic forcing and natural variability to see which dominates observed temperatures and also uses variations in the timing of changes to determine if causal dependence across data series can be inferred.

Process-Based Attribution focuses on understanding the physical mechanisms behind observed changes. This approach combines observations, climate models, and theoretical understanding to attribute changes in specific processes to forcings. This approach is often used for regional climate phenomena, such as monsoon changes or polar amplification

Extreme Event Attribution assesses the role of human influence in the likelihood of occurrence or intensity of extreme weather events (*e.g.* heat waves or droughts). Methods include:

- Probabilistic Event Attribution uses large ensembles of climate model simulations to compare observed events to model-generated counterfactuals
- Storyline Approach examines the physical processes driving an event and evaluates how anthropogenic forcings might have modified those processes

8.3 Attribution of global warming

Attribution statements for global warming in the three most recent IPCC Assessment reports are:

AR4: **Most of the observed increase** in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is *very likely* due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations. (IPCC 2007)

AR5: It is *extremely likely* that **more than half of the observed increase** in global average surface temperature from 1951 to 2010 was caused by the anthropogenic increase in greenhouse gas concentrations and other anthropogenic forcings together. The best estimate of the human-induced contribution to warming is similar to the observed warming over this period. (IPCC 2013)

AR6: The *likely* range of total human-caused global surface temperature increase from 1850–1900 to 2010–2019 is 0.8°C to 1.3°C, with a best estimate of 1.07°C. It is *likely* that well-mixed GHGs contributed a warming of 1.0°C to 2.0°C, other human drivers (principally aerosols) contributed a cooling of 0.0°C to 0.8°C, natural drivers changed global surface temperature by –0.1°C to +0.1°C, and internal variability changed it by –0.2°C to +0.2°C. It is *very likely* that **well-mixed GHGs were the main driver** of tropospheric warming since 1979. (IPCC 2021)

The AR4 and AR5 attribution statements reference the warming since the mid-20th century, the period when greenhouse gas emissions began rapidly increasing. The words “most” and “more than half” are deliberately imprecise, potentially ranging from 51 to 99 percent of the warming – presumably this imprecision is to account for structural uncertainties such as natural internal variability. The confidence level increases from *very likely* to *extremely likely* from AR4 to AR5. The structure of the attribution statement in the AR6 is fundamentally different, referencing the warming to the period 1850-1900. The AR6 attribution statement is more precise numerically, but with a lower level of confidence at “likely” – the AR6 attributes essentially all the warming to increases in greenhouse gases. The most confident statement from the AR6 relates to the tropospheric warming since 1979, using the words “main driver” and “*very likely*.”

There are three areas of substantive criticism of the IPCC’s assessment of the causes of the recent warming: inadequate assessment of natural climate variability, inappropriate statistical methods, and substantial discrepancies between models and observations. The last is discussed in Chapter 6, while this chapter discusses the first two factors. All of these criticisms are relevant to the IPCC’s policy-informing attribution of the recent warming, which also underpins extreme event attribution

8.3.1 Natural climate variability

IPCC AR6 states that natural external drivers since 1850-1900 have changed global surface temperature by –0.1°C to +0.1°C, and internal variability has changed it by –0.2°C to +0.2°C – on average having essentially no net impact on the warming since 1850-1900. As discussed below, this minimal contribution of natural variability has been disputed by several publications that question the magnitudes of solar variability and internal variability from large-scale ocean circulation.

Solar variability

IPCC AR5 concluded that the best estimate of radiative forcing due to Total Solar Irradiance (TSI) changes over the period 1750–2011 was very small (0.05 W/m², Myrhe *et al.*, 2014). IPCC AR6 acknowledges a much larger range of estimates of changes in TSI over the last several centuries, stating that the TSI between the Maunder Minimum (1645–1715) and the second half of the twentieth century

increased by 0.7–2.7 W/m², a range that includes both low and high variability TSI data sets (Gulev, 2021). However, the recommended forcing dataset for the CMIP6 climate model simulations used in AR6 for attribution studies averages two data sets with low solar variability (Matthes, 2017).

While AR6 shows a substantially greater solar impact than does AR5, the overall impact on the climate was still assessed to be small compared to anthropogenic forcing. However, the impact of solar variations on the climate is uncertain and subject to substantial debate - something that is not evident from the IPCC assessment reports (Lockwood, 2012; Connolly *et al.*, 2021).

The change of TSI over time remains a challenging problem. Since 1978, there have been direct measurements of TSI from satellites. However, the data exhibits non-negligible inconsistencies, and interpreting any multi-decadal trends in TSI requires comparisons of observations from overlapping satellites. There are several rival composite TSI datasets, disagreeing as to whether TSI increased or decreased during the period 1986–96 (the ACRIM gap; see Chapter 4). Further, the satellite record of TSI is used to calibrate proxy models, whereby past solar variations are inferred from sunspots and cosmogenic isotope measurements (Velasco Herrera *et al.*, 2015).

There is substantial evidence for high solar activity in the second half of the 20th century (starting in 1959) and extending into the 1990's, before a decline in the early 21st century; this period is often termed the “Modern Maximum.” (Chatzistergos *et al.*, 2023; Solanki *et al.*, 2004; Usoskin *et al.*, 2007). However, some scientists have concluded that it is not possible to be confident of any multi-decadal trend in TSI (Schmutz, 2021).

This uncertainty causes some reconstructions of TSI from 1750 to have low variability (implying a very low impact of solar variations on global mean surface temperature) whereas datasets with high TSI variability can explain more than 70 percent of the temperature variability since preindustrial times (Scafetta, 2013; Stefani, 2021). The choice of TSI satellite record used in an analysis can therefore substantially influence how much climate change is attributed to human versus natural forcings.

There is growing evidence that other aspects of solar variability, which are referred to as solar indirect effects, either amplify TSI forcing or are independent of TSI forcing. Scafetta *et al.* (2023) suggests that ~80 percent of solar influence on climate may stem from non-TSI mechanisms. There are numerous candidate processes, including solar ultraviolet changes; energetic particle precipitation; atmospheric-electric-field effect on cloud cover; cloud changes produced by solar-modulated galactic cosmic rays; large relative changes in the magnetic field; and the strength of the solar wind. Such solar indirect effects are not included in climate models, although indirect methods of estimating their impacts suggest they are significant. However, claims of non-TSI mechanisms influencing climate are uncertain and debated.

Natural variability of large-scale ocean circulations

Variations in global mean surface temperature are linked to recurrent large-scale variations in ocean circulation patterns, including the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation (AMO), the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) and the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO). These circulations influence ocean heat uptake and heat distribution and also influence atmospheric circulation patterns and cloud distributions. There is some debate as to whether these variations are strictly internal to the climate system, or whether this variability can have a solar/astronomical origin or can be influenced by large volcanic eruptions.

While climate models simulate the large-scale ocean circulations and internal climate variability, most models show have too little amplitude compared to observations at multi-decadal frequencies and phasing out-of-sync with the observed climate (Kravtsov *et al.* 2024). Averaging multiple simulations effectively averages out the internal variations, leaving only the forced climate variability (*e.g.* CO₂ forcing). With most of the modern warming beginning in the late 1970's, the recent 50-year warming is on the same time scale as the multi-decadal oscillations of the AMO and PDO.

Here are summary statements from the IPCC AR5 and AR6 reports:

AR5: Decadal variability in the Pacific, associated with the PDO or IPO [Interdecadal Pacific Oscillation], contributes significantly to regional and global temperature trends, but the relative contributions of internal variability and external forcing are difficult to disentangle in CMIP5 simulations.

AR6: Since AR5, there has been increased understanding of the role of internal variability, such as ENSO, PDO, and AMO, in modulating regional climate trends. However, limitations in simulating the exact timing and amplitude of these modes in CMIP6 models contribute to uncertainties in attributing observed changes to anthropogenic forcing (*high confidence*).

The amplitude of the peak-to-trough impact of the multi-decadal oscillations on global temperatures has been assessed by the IPCC AR6: “The likely range of change due to internal variability is -0.2°C to $+0.2^{\circ}\text{C}$ (IPCC, 2021).” This implies a trough-to-peak change of 0.4°C . Over many centuries, any global temperature changes from the troughs and peaks will cancel out, with little to no net impact.

However, with a nominal timescale of 60-80 years for oscillations such as the AMO and PDO, the timing of the peaks and troughs can be confused with the secular trend. This becomes very relevant for attributing the warming for the past 50 years, when most of the recent warming has occurred. Even if climate models have the correct amplitude of the multidecadal oscillations, the timing of the peaks and troughs is not adequately simulated, with each model and individual ensemble simulating a different phasing. Once the simulations of the ensemble members and different models are averaged, the natural internal variability contribution is averaged out, effectively cancelling the role of natural internal variability in the attribution process.

The time series of global surface temperature anomalies since 1850 (Figure 8.1) shows irregular variations of significant amplitude against the background of an overall warming trend and, after 1976, a pronounced difference in trends between the Northern Hemisphere and the Southern Hemisphere. The period between 1905-1945 shows a strong trend of warming. The following thirty years from 1945-1976 showed slightly declining temperatures. The most recent warming period started in 1977.

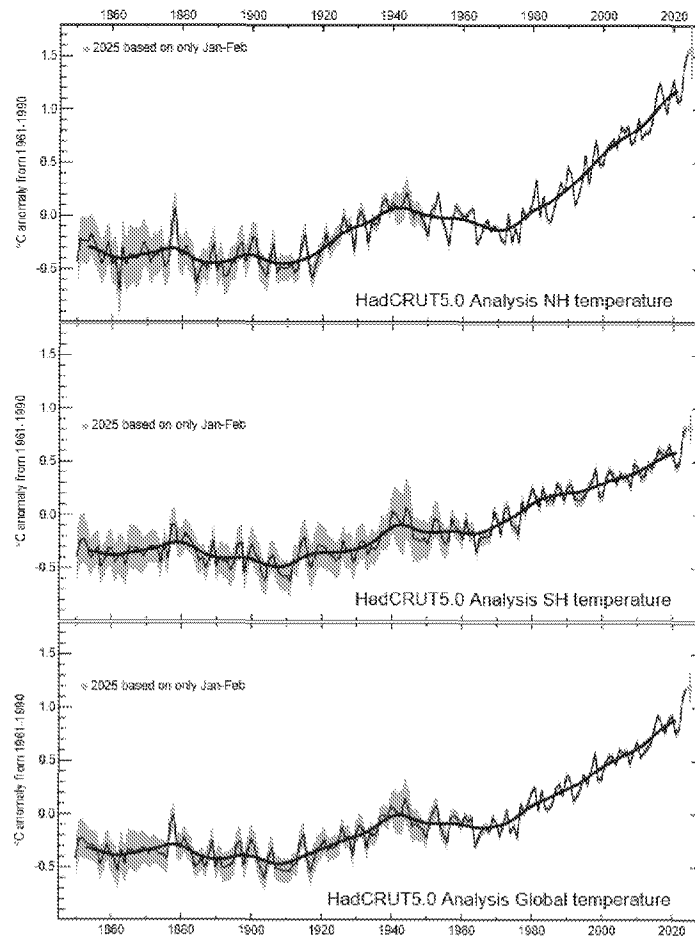


Figure 8.1 Global average surface temperature anomalies 1850—2025. Top: Northern hemisphere. Middle: Southern hemisphere. Bottom: Global average. Source: UK Hadley Centre [HYPERLINK "<https://crudata.uea.ac.uk/cru/data/temperature/HadCRUT5.0Analysis.pdf>"]

The causes of the early 20th century warming are discussed by Hegerl *et al.* (2017; 2019). The atmospheric CO₂ concentration increased from 298 ppm in 1905 to 310 ppm in 1941, implying that CO₂ had little impact. Volcanic activity during this period was very low, and solar forcing is uncertain. Yet Hegerl *et al.* (2017) somehow inferred that 40-54 percent of this warming could be attributed to external forcing, with the rest associated with internal variability. Bronniman et al (2024) focused on the causes of the cooling in the first decade of the 20th century in the Southern Hemisphere. They found that the cooling was related to a La-Niña-like pattern in the Pacific, a cold tropical and subtropical South Atlantic, a cold extratropical South Pacific, and cool southern midlatitude land areas. The Southern Annular Mode was positive, with a strengthened Amundsen–Bellingshausen seas low, although the spread of the data products is considerable.

The warming in the 1930's and subsequent cooling during mid-century was particularly pronounced in the Arctic. Bokuchava and Semenov (2021) find that these variations were most likely caused by a combined effect of long-term natural climate variations in the North Atlantic and North Pacific with a contribution of the natural radiative forcing related to the reduced volcanic activity and variations of solar activity as well as growing greenhouse gases concentrations. Tokinaga *et al.* (2017) showed that the combined effect of internally generated Pacific and Atlantic interdecadal variability intensified Arctic

warming in the early 20th century. The synchronized Pacific-Atlantic warming drastically alters planetary-scale circulations over the Northern Hemisphere; these same circulation patterns have a global influence.

The cooling period between 1945 and 1976 has been referred to as the “grand hiatus.” Numerous causes have been hypothesized: natural internal variability from fluctuations associated with the Pacific Decadal Oscillation and Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation; cooling from increased emissions of aerosols from industrial activities; increased heat uptake in the Atlantic, Southern and Equatorial Pacific Oceans. Thompson *et al.* (2010) find that the hemispheric differences in temperature trends in the middle of the twentieth century stem largely from a rapid drop in Northern Hemisphere sea surface temperatures of about 0.3 °C between about 1968 and 1972.

The Great Pacific Climate Shift of 1976-1977 was a notable climatic event characterized by an abrupt change in the North Pacific Ocean's atmosphere-ocean system that interacted with global climate patterns. This shift is closely associated with the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) that oscillates between warm and cool phases over decades. The 1976 shift marked a transition from a predominantly negative (cool) PDO phase (1947–1976) to a positive (warm) phase (1977 through 2000), with significant implications for global and regional climate patterns including the frequencies of El Niño and La Niña events. The Great Pacific Climate Shift coincided with the beginning of a period of accelerated global warming. When the Great Pacific Climate Shift is accounted for in climate attribution analyses since 1950, 40 percent or more of the warming in the second half of the 20th century is attributed to natural internal variability (McLean *et al.*, 2009; Tung and Zhou, 2013; Chylek *et al.*, 2016; Scafetta, 2021).

8.3.2 Optimal fingerprinting

Optimal fingerprinting is a statistical technique introduced by Allen and Tett (1999) that compares observed climate data to climate model simulations to identify patterns (or “fingerprints”) associated with human or natural forcing. It involves taking a vector of observed climate changes, such as warming rates in locations around the world, and decomposing them into a weighted sum of “signals”, which are analogues to the observations generated by climate models with different types of forcings. The weights are chosen using a regression method called Total Least Squares. The analysis commonly uses just two signals, one generated by models using only anthropogenic forcings and one using only natural forcings. If the estimated weighting coefficient attached to a signal is significantly different from zero, then that signal is said to be “detected”. If it is close to 1.0, then the model generating the signal is said to be consistent with observations. If it is less than 1.0, then the model signal for that forcing is too strong and needs to be scaled down, and vice-versa. Both the observed data and the signals are weighted using a model-generated estimate of patterns of randomness in the climate system so as, in principle, to put maximum weight on regions where natural variability is minimized.

Optimal fingerprinting is the primary tool for attribution in the research literature. While it has been widely used and prominently featured by the IPCC since 2001, there is very little literature examining the statistical properties of the results it generates. One of its inherent weaknesses is that results depend on assumptions about the accuracy of climate models, especially regarding their representation of natural variability (IPCC AR5 Ch 10.2.3).

A series of papers by McKittrick (McKittrick 2021, 2022, 2023, 2025) has challenged the optimal fingerprinting method, arguing that it is inherently unreliable and that practices adopted from econometrics can provide more valid results. Statistical theory requires that for regression models to yield unbiased coefficients, a set of assumptions called the Gauss-Markov conditions must hold. McKittrick (2021) argued that the Allen and Tett (1999) methodology violates the Gauss-Markov conditions, leading to potentially biased and inconsistent fingerprinting coefficients, undermining the reliability of the method. Chen *et al.* (2023) confirmed this analysis and argued that the method could yield unbiased results, but only under very stringent assumptions. McKittrick (2022) and (2023) raised a further concern that climate scientists—virtually alone among

scientific disciplines—have used an estimation method called Total Least Squares (TLS) to estimate anthropogenic greenhouse gas signal coefficients, despite its tendency to be unreliable unless some strong assumptions hold that in practice are unlikely to be true. Under conditions that easily arise in optimal fingerprinting, TLS estimates have a large positive bias. Thus, any study that used TLS for optimal fingerprinting without verifying its applicability in the specific data context has likely overstated the attribution.

McKittrick (2025) presented an empirical example comparing the results of conventional optimal fingerprinting against methods drawn from mainstream econometrics that are known to be valid for the specific application of signal detection. While the IPCC optimal fingerprinting method yields an anthropogenic signal coefficient close to 1.0 on a global temperature data set spanning 1900 to 2010, consistent estimation yields a coefficient around 0.4, which rises to about 0.65 on data spanning 1980 to 2010, implying the model response to greenhouse gases needs to be scaled down by about half to optimally match observations. The natural forcing signal coefficient, by contrast, is between 2.0 and 4.0, implying the climate model signals of natural forcing need to be scaled up two-to four-fold to match observed climate change. The fingerprinting coefficients estimated in McKittrick (2025), when used to scale the average sensitivity of the climate models used to generate the forcing signals in his data set, imply a Transient Climate Sensitivity of 1.4°C, which is consistent with the estimate by Lewis (2023) using a different estimation method and multiple independent data sets.

While these analyses do not falsify all results stemming from the IPCC optimal fingerprinting method, they do challenge the basis on which they were believed to be correct.

8.3.3 Time series methods

The IPCC (AR5 WGI 10.2.2) drew attention to alternative approaches of assessing causality that emerged from the time series econometrics literature. These have the advantage of not depending on assumptions about the accuracy of climate models, but the disadvantage that they depend on difficult-to-test assumptions about the data generating process underlying climate and forcing data. The methods, now referred to as climate econometrics, use the tools of unit root testing, Granger causality and cointegration analysis, all of which are familiar in economics and finance and which are slowly being adopted in climate science. Time series analysis methods hold out the possibility of determining whether anthropogenic or natural forcings are the primary drivers of climate change without requiring the use of climate models, although key questions remain unsettled (e.g. Dergiades *et al.*, 2016, Balcombe *et al.*, 2019, Dagsvik *et al.*, 2020, Razzak, 2022, Dagsvik and Moen, 2023).

“Granger causality” modeling is a tool for determining directions of influence in data series that move together. It is a statistical, not a physical, concept. If knowing the current value of one variable significantly improves the forecast accuracy of another variable, we can infer a causal connection exists; this is called Granger causality. The modeling tools, called vector autoregression, measure direct impulse-response patterns and feedbacks. An application to the well-known Vostok ice core data revealed an error in Al Gore’s documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. Gore showed the data and drew attention to the coherence of temperature and CO₂ changes over a 440,000 year span, which he asserted was due to CO₂ driving temperature changes. But temperature changes can also affect atmospheric CO₂ levels. Davidson *et al.* (2015) examined the series and found that temperature Granger causes CO₂ but not the reverse. In other words on the time scales represented in the Vostok data the coherence in the series is primarily due to the influence of temperature on CO₂ levels, not the feedback of CO₂ levels on temperature.

In summary, the primary statistical methods for attributing causation in climate data are optimal fingerprinting and time series analysis. Applications of the Allen and Tett (1999) optimal fingerprinting method dominate the attribution literature and have underpinned past IPCC conclusions, but results depend

on the accuracy of climate models and the method has recently been criticized as inherently biased. Time series methods do not depend on climate models but require assumptions of their own and have generated results that have thus far not converged on a consensus.

8.4 Declining planetary albedo and recent record warmth

A sharp recent increase in global average temperatures has raised the question of short-term drivers of climate. One such candidate is the fraction of absorbed solar radiation which has also increased abruptly in recent years. The question to be answered is whether the change is an internal feedback to warming caused by greenhouse gases or whether something else increased the fraction of absorbed radiation which then caused the recent warming.

The albedo is the fraction of incoming solar radiation that is reflected back into space rather than being absorbed by the planet. Highly reflective surfaces like cloud tops and snow and ice are most important in this regard. The Earth's albedo is approximately 30 percent, meaning almost a third of the sunlight that reaches Earth is directly reflected back to space. A lower albedo implies more solar energy is absorbed by the planet to be then re-radiated as heat. Hence, other things being equal, a decline in albedo is associated with a warming of the Earth.

Arguably the most striking change in the Earth's climate system during the 21st century is a significant reduction in planetary albedo since 2015, which has coincided with at least two years of record global warmth. Figure 8.2 shows the planetary albedo variations since 2000, when there are good satellite observations. The 0.5 percent reduction in planetary albedo since 2015 corresponds to an increase of 1.7 W/m² in absorbed solar energy averaged over the planet (Hansen and Karecha, 2025). For comparison, the IPCC estimate of forcing from the increase in atmospheric CO₂ compared to preindustrial times is approximately 2.2 W/m² (Figure 3.1.2).

Looking back prior to 2000 with less adequate data, Goessling *et al.* (2025) assessed that planetary albedo was relatively low around the 1940's and 50's, before rising industrial aerosol precursor emissions increased albedo until the 1980's. The strongest planetary albedo excursions were high-albedo episodes caused by volcanic eruptions, such as after the Mount Pinatubo eruption in 1991. Although uncertain, the 2023 planetary albedo minimum may have been the lowest since at least 1940.

Changes in surface characteristics can't explain this decrease in planetary albedo since 2015:

- Arctic sea ice extent has declined by about 5 percent since 1980 (https://nsidc.org/data/seaice_index/images/s_plot_hires.png), although following 2007 there has been a pause in the Arctic sea ice decline (England *et al.*, 2025)
- Regarding Antarctic sea ice, the IPCC AR6 concludes that "There has been no significant trend in Antarctic sea ice area from 1979 to 2020 due to regionally opposing trends and large internal variability." (Summary for Policymakers, A.1.5)
- Northern hemispheric annual snow cover has been slowly declining since 1967, with barely significant trends. The data show the Northern Hemisphere has snowier winters, accompanied by more rapid melt in spring and summer. [HYPERLINK "<http://climate.rutgers.edu/snowcover/>"]
- Global greening (Chapter 2) is contributing to the decrease in planetary albedo, as forests have a lower albedo than open lands or snow. However, there is some evidence that forests increase cloud cover (high reflectivity), which counteracts the direct albedo increase associated with increasing forested area.

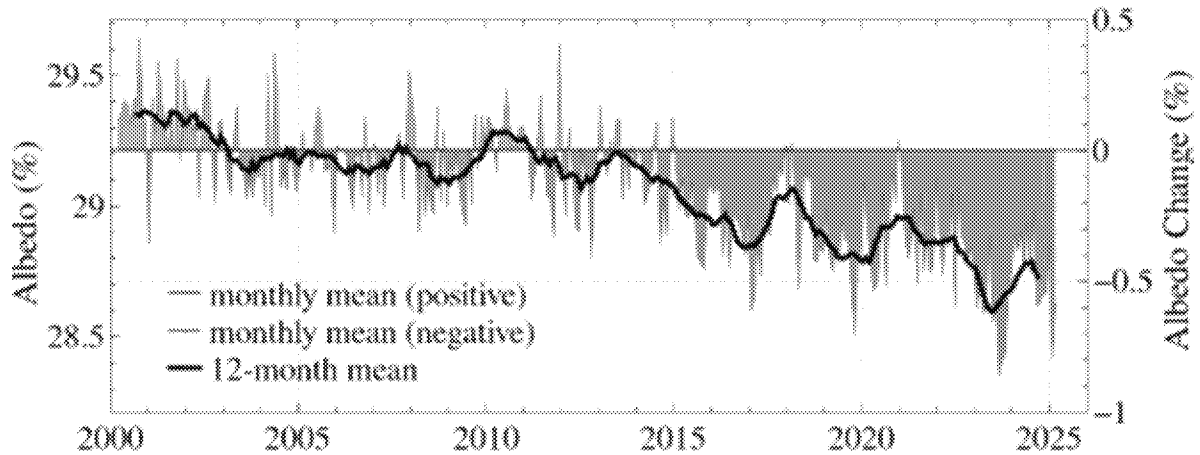


Figure 8.2. Earth's albedo (reflectivity, in percent), with seasonality removed. From Hansen and Karecha (2025)

Changes in surface reflectivity are contributing to a small, slow decline in planetary albedo. However, these changes cannot explain the sharp decline in planetary albedo beginning in 2015. Further, any changes in surface albedo are effectively damped by about a factor 3 on average, primarily due to cloud masking (Loeb *et al.* 2019). Surface albedo changes have thus contributed only weakly to the recent planetary albedo decline, particularly when averaged annually and globally. This leaves the most likely explanation for the sharp albedo decline as changes in atmospheric aerosols and/or clouds.

Aerosols are small particles in the atmosphere that reflect sunlight and can interact with cloud processes to make the clouds more reflective. Aerosols have both natural origins (*e.g.* dust from soils, wildfires) as well as human origins from combustion (including fossil fuels). Regions that are greening and/or have an increase in rainfall might be producing less dust. For anthropogenic aerosols, new ship fuel regulations aimed at reducing sulfur emissions were implemented in three phases, in 2010, 2015 and 2020. Sulfate particles reflect solar radiation. Cleaner air means less solar radiation is reflected, which contributes to surface warming. Indirect effects of sulfate aerosols include increasing the reflectivity of low-level clouds in the subtropics. There is controversy surrounding the importance of this change in sulfate emissions to the Earth's radiation balance (Hodnebrog *et al.*, 2024; Yuan *et al.*, 2024), but the restriction of this effect to major shipping routes suggests a small global impact (Schmidt, 2024).

Changes in clouds are the primary candidate to explain the decline in global albedo since 2015. Two recent papers (Loeb *et al.*, 2024; Goessling *et al.* 2024) have addressed recent variations in cloud properties. By considering satellite and reanalysis data, Loeb *et al.* found that decreases in low and mid-level clouds since 2015 are the primary reason for decreasing planetary albedo in the Northern hemisphere, whereas in the Southern hemisphere the decrease in planetary albedo is primarily due to decreases in mid-level clouds across all latitude zones. Goessling *et al.* (2024) found that cloud anomalies were mainly due to reduced low-level clouds. Regions with coherent low-level cloud reductions over the past decade include the warm pool region around the Maritime Continent and the northern extratropical western Pacific, as well as large parts of the Atlantic and adjacent land regions. The reduction of global cloud cover identified in these analyses since 2015 is 1-2 percent.

The question then becomes what caused the change in cloud cover. Two causes have been posited for the declining cloud cover over the past decade:

- Natural climate variability

- Changes in low cloud cover associated with warming sea surface temperatures, implying an emerging positive feedback to climate change (Hansen and Karecha, 2025)

The existence of a new positive low cloud feedback that began emerging in 2015 is not easy to justify. However, there are numerous natural climate signals during this period that are associated with atmospheric circulation changes that can influence the distribution of clouds:

- The 2014-2016 was one of the strongest El Niño events on record
- A cold anomaly beginning in 2015 in the subpolar gyre of the North Atlantic reflects a shift in the ocean circulation pattern associated with decadal variability in the Atlantic (Frajka-Williams *et al.*, 2017; Arthun *et al.* 2021).
- The Pacific Decadal Oscillation positive index peaked in 2016, then declined and has been in negative territory since late 2019
- Eruption of the submarine Hunga-Tonga volcano in 2022

Interannual cloud anomalies associated with the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) have a significant global signal and strong regional signals especially over the tropical Indian and Pacific Oceans.

The Hunga Tonga eruption is remarkable in its coincidence with the exceptionally low value of planetary albedo in 2023. Goessling *et al.* (2024) found that the cloud perturbations in 2023 showed a different pattern from the overall pattern since 2015, with reduced cloud cover being most pronounced in the northern hemisphere and tropics. Regional reductions in cloud cover were most pronounced over the eastern Indian Ocean, over South America and extending over the eastern Pacific, as well as over northern North America, in the Southern Ocean around 60S, in the subtropical and eastern North Atlantic, and in parts of the North Pacific.

The Hunga Tonga eruption was unusual in that it injected large amounts of water vapor into the stratosphere, in addition to sulfate particles. Early publications focused on the impacts to stratospheric circulations and the direct radiative impact. In 2025, papers are emerging that examine the indirect effects of Hunga Tonga on surface climate using ensemble simulations from earth system models (Bednarz *et al.*, 2025; Kuchar *et al.*, 2025). These papers found statistically significant impacts on regional climates that were driven by circulation changes from couplings between the stratosphere and troposphere. These papers indicate the complex interactions between volcanic activity and climate dynamics. More research is needed to untangle any impacts of Hunga Tonga eruption on planetary albedo.

In summary, the decline in planetary albedo and the concurrent decline in cloudiness have emphasized the importance of clouds and their variations to global climate variability and change. A change of 1 to 2 percent in global cloud cover has a greater radiative impact on the climate than the direct radiative effect of doubling CO₂. While it is difficult to untangle causes of the trend, the competing explanations for the cause of the declining cloud cover have substantial implications for assessing the Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity and also for the attribution of the recent warming. An additional 10 years of data should help clarify whether this is a strong positive cloud feedback associated with warming, or a temporary fluctuation driven by natural variability

8.5 Attribution of climate impact drivers

The IPCC (Ranasinghe *et al.* 2021) defines “climate impact drivers” or CIDs as “physical climate system conditions (e.g., means, events, extremes) that affect an element of society or ecosystems.” Hence CIDs are those features of the weather and climate system of primary interest in assessing the impacts of climate change since they potentially affect humans and the natural world. For instance, under the heading “Heat and Cold,” CIDs are identified as mean air temperature, extreme heat, cold spells and frost. The IPCC

also points out that CIDs are not necessarily harm-related: depending on the system in question they can be detrimental, neutral, beneficial or a combination.

The first column of Table 12.12 in Ranasinghe *et al.* (2021, p. 1856), reproduced here as Table 8.1, summarizes the AR6 assessment of whether a signal of attributable anthropogenic influence has emerged across all major CIDs. One of the themes of this chapter is that attribution methods used by the IPCC tend to overstate the anthropogenic influence and understate the role of natural variability. Nonetheless a striking feature of that summary table is how few CIDs exhibit an anthropogenic signal sufficient to distinguish them from natural variability.

Out of the 33 weather impact categories an anthropogenic signal is asserted with *high confidence* in only five, and with *medium confidence* in a further four. (Note that one of the CIDs is an increase in CO₂ levels, and since it is a tautology to attribute this to increased CO₂ levels this CID can be ignored.) For the rest the IPCC does not claim to have detected anthropogenic drivers. Of the five *high confidence* assertions, two are for changes in average temperatures (air and ocean) hence are not measures of extreme weather. Further, two of the four *medium confidence* assertions are related to ocean chemistry and thus are likewise not related to extreme weather. The IPCC does not assert a human influence on many non-temperature weather features such as wind, precipitation, flooding, drought etc.

Columns 2 and 3 of IPCC Table 12.12 report on whether anthropogenic signals are expected to emerge this century under RCP8.5, the most extreme forcing scenario. We have omitted these columns for several reasons. First, because they refer to whether climate models project detectable signals in the observations, which is a very different question than our concern here, whether a signal has been detected in historical data. Second, as we discuss in Chapter 4, the RCP8.5 scenario is a misleading and implausible high-end storyline, it is not a “base case” or business-as-usual projection. Third, the ensemble of detailed models is acknowledged (Palmer and Stevens 2019) to be “not fit for purpose” in describing regional changes and “unable to represent future conditions at the degree of spatial, temporal, and probabilistic precision with which projections are often provided.” (Nissan et al, 2019). Even with these caveats, we note that the omitted columns in AR6 Table 12.12 show most weather impacts are not expected to exhibit an anthropogenic signal this century.

Climatic Impact-driver Type	Climatic Impact-driver Category	Already Emerged in Historical Period
Heat and Cold	Mean air temperature	1
	Extreme heat	2
	Cold spell	4
	Frost	
Wet and Dry	Mean precipitation	
	River flood	
	Heavy precipitation and pluvial flood	
	Landslide	
	Aridity	
	Hydrological drought	
	Agricultural and ecological drought	
	Fire weather	
Wind	Mean wind speed	
	Severe wind storm	
	Tropical cyclone	
	Sand and dust storm	
Snow and Ice	Snow, glacier and ice sheet	
	Permafrost	
	Lake, river and sea ice	11
	Heavy snowfall and ice storm	
	Hail	
	Snow avalanche	
Coastal	Relative sea level	
	Coastal flood	
	Coastal erosion	
Open Ocean	Mean ocean temperature	
	Marine heatwave	
	Ocean acidity	
	Ocean salinity	13
	Dissolved oxygen	14
Other	Air pollution weather	
	Atmospheric CO ₂ at surface	
	Radiation at surface	

High confidence of decrease	Medium confidence of decrease	Low confidence in direction of change	Medium confidence of increase	High confidence of increase
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------------------	-------------------------------	-----------------------------

Table 8.1: Reproduction of column 1 of Table 12.12, IPCC AR6 Working Group I report. Emergence of anthropogenic signal in historical period for CIDs shown. White: no signal detected. Blue and orange: change detected (decrease or increase) and confidence level as indicated in color legend.

As discussed in Chapter 6 natural variability dominates patterns of extreme weather systems and simplistic assertions of trend detection are frequently undermined by regional heterogeneity and trend reversals over time. Table 8.1 makes the related point that, again contrary to popular belief, attribution of changes in most extreme weather types to human influence is not currently possible. Taking wind as an example, the IPCC claims that an anthropogenic signal has not emerged in average wind speeds, severe windstorms, tropical cyclones or sand and dust storms, nor is one expected to emerge this century even under an extreme emissions scenario. The same applies to drought and fire weather.

8.6 Extreme event attribution (EEA)

Examining the IPCC's treatment of extreme weather and climate event attribution more broadly, the AR6 provides an ambiguous assessment of the role of anthropogenic warming that differs between chapters. Chapter 11 of WG1 states (Seneviratne *et al.*, 2021):

Evidence of observed changes in extremes and their attribution to human influence (including greenhouse gas and aerosol emissions and land-use changes) has strengthened since AR5, in particular for extreme precipitation, droughts, tropical cyclones and compound extremes (including dry/hot events and fire weather). Some recent hot extreme events would have been extremely unlikely to occur without human influence on the climate system.

By contrast, as noted above, Chapter 12 of WG1 (Table 12.12) paints a different picture – presumably, the expert judgment of different groups of authors for the two chapters came to different conclusions (Ranasinghe, 2021):

- High confidence in an increase in extreme heat events in tropical regions where observations allow trend estimation and in most regions in the mid-latitudes, medium confidence elsewhere
- Medium confidence in a decrease in extreme cold events in Australia, Africa and most of northern South America where observations allow trend estimation
- No evidence of emergence in the historical period of a change in river floods, heavy precipitation, drought, fire weather, severe wind storms, and tropical cyclones

While the overall issue of detecting changes in extreme weather events and their attribution remains ambiguous, most of the activity in this area relates to the attribution of particular extreme weather events. The most prominent effort is World Weather Attribution (WWA; worldweatherattribution.org), an international research initiative for extreme event attribution that purports to analyze how climate change influences the likelihood and intensity of extreme weather events. Their approach is to use large ensembles of regional climate models to compare an event in today's climate with one in a counterfactual pre-industrial climate without human influences.

WWA has a prominent public presence in linking extreme weather to climate change, with its press releases attracting considerable attention in public and policy discussions. However, the WWA's extensive promotion of non-peer-reviewed findings, its funding ties, its open admission to shaping analyses to serve litigation, and its methodological challenges have sparked controversies, with critics questioning the robustness and impartiality of their conclusions (Pielke Jr. 2024). Despite these issues, WWA's work continues to influence climate science and media narratives. Technical criticisms of the approach include a lack of a formal detection process; an implicit assumption that 100 percent of the post-industrial warming is caused by greenhouse gases; and a failure to adequately account for internal climate variability.

Because EEA is relatively new many basic methodological issues have yet to be settled in the expert literature. An important challenge is the lack of data. Extreme events are, by definition, rare. Many analyses of extreme event types (including the U.S. National Assessment Reports) only evaluate data since 1950 or 1970. However, as emphasized by Chapter 6, many of the worst extreme weather and climate events in U.S. history occurred prior to the first half of the 20th century, including in the early 19th century. And if paleoclimate reconstructions are considered, it becomes very difficult for an event to pass the detection thresholds of exceeding what is expected from natural variability, particularly if a reasonably sized geographic region is considered.

Another challenge is defining the event under study. There is a longstanding literature in statistics and econometrics on the challenge of analyzing data with outliers. The issue arises because a data series establishes a probability distribution defining the expected range of observations. If an outlier is observed it might indicate that the underlying process giving rise to the data distribution has changed (which in the weather context would mean that a climate change has been detected) or that the underlying process has multiple regimes each with a different probability distribution, in which case observing an outlier simply means we were temporarily in a different regime, but the system itself was unchanged. If a time series contains only a single outlier event at the end of the series it is not possible to determine which model is the correct one (Chen and Liu 1993). For instance, there might be an “ordinary” weather regime that yields a distribution of summer daytime highs in a particular coastal region, and a second “heatwave” regime that kicks in when an inland blocking event occurs, which yields a temperature distribution centered 15°C higher than the first one. A day with temperatures 13°C above normal would either be an extreme heat anomaly under the first regime or a somewhat cool event under the second, and we have no way in this case of knowing on statistical grounds which view is correct.

Visser and Petersen (2012) and Sardeshmukh *et al.* (2015) both point out that different distributions may fit observed data equally well but yield very different implications about the likelihood of a specific weather event. Visser and Petersen argue that, in view of the deep uncertainties of extreme weather analysis, drawing a connection between individual events and global climate change should be avoided. Furthermore, the existence of an outlier at the end of a data series poses the problem that estimates of the event probabilities will be biased whether the outlier is included or excluded (Barlow *et al.*, 2020). Methods to eliminate the bias have not yet been established, leading some experts (e.g. Miralles and Davison 2023) to argue that in settings in which a data series contains a single extreme event at the end, estimation of a return period for the extreme event will be so biased and uncertain that it should be avoided altogether.

We provide a case study of a recent high impact extreme event in the U.S. to illustrate the challenges and ambiguities in attributing the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events to human-caused warming.

8.6.1 Case study – 2021 Western North America heat wave

The 2021 Western North America heat wave was an extreme event that affected much of Western North America in late June 2021. In particular, surface temperature records were set in Portland, OR (116°F; previous record 107°F) and Seattle, WA (108 °F; previous record 103°F) (Mass *et al.*, 2024).

The WWA team generated international headlines with their analysis, which provided the following attribution statements (WWA, 2021; Philip *et al.*, 2022):

- Based on observations and modeling, the occurrence of this heatwave was virtually impossible without human-caused climate change.
- The event is estimated to be about a one in 1000-year event in today’s climate.
- The event would have been at least 150 times rarer without human-induced climate change.
- This heatwave was about 2°C hotter than it would have been if it had occurred at the beginning of the industrial revolution (when global mean temperatures were 1.2°C cooler than today).

But an important counter to the first claim is that other researchers concluded from historical weather data that while a heat wave of the magnitude observed was indeed virtually impossible without anthropogenic climate change, it was also virtually impossible *with* climate change. Bercos-Hickey (2022) noted “these temperatures were virtually impossible under any previously experienced meteorological conditions, with or without global warming.” McKinnon and Simpson (2022) stated “the most likely explanation remains that the weather event itself was ‘bad luck.’” The 2023 Oregon Climate Assessment (Fleischman, 2023) concluded that the heat dome would have formed even without climate change and “There is no evidence that the highly unusual combination of weather features that drove the heat dome were made more likely by climate change, and climate models do not project an increase in the frequency of high-pressure ridges over the Pacific Northwest” (Fleischman, 2023, p. 49).

Mass *et al.* (2024) summarizes the proximate sequence of compound events leading to the heat wave. There was a record-breaking mid-tropospheric ridge over the Pacific Northwest, forced by a tropical disturbance in the western Pacific. This produced record-breaking mid-tropospheric temperatures, strong subsidence in the lower atmosphere, low-level easterly flow that produced downslope warming on regional terrain and the removal of cooler marine air, and an approaching low-level trough that enhanced downslope flow. The event occurred at a time of maximum solar insolation, and drier-than-normal soil moisture. Using a storyline approach, Mass *et al.* assessed that there is no trend in drought and dry soils in the Pacific Northwest; there is no evidence of global warming producing stronger ridges of high pressure, and no observed trend in heat waves or record temperatures in the region. They concluded that although anthropogenic warming might have contributed as much as 2°F to the magnitude of the event, there is little evidence of further amplification of the event from increasing greenhouse gases.

Bercos-Hickey *et al.* (2022) conducted a statistical analysis of a model-based attribution study of this heat wave. Because the event is a far outlier and far above the bounds of Generalized Extreme Value distributions fitted from historical data, they concluded that estimates of return times, quantitative changes in event magnitude and frequency, and probability of the extreme temperatures such as provided by the WWA are not accurate and should be interpreted as having low confidence. They found that hindcast attribution methods using an ensemble of regional climate models, combined with Pearl (2009) causal inferences, can provide limited and conditional information about the magnitude of the human influence on this heatwave - they provided a more highly constrained estimate that human activities caused a ~1.4°F–1.8°F increase in the daily maximum temperatures.

Zeder *et al.* (2023) also concluded that the methods employed by Philip *et al.* (2022, the WWA analysis) tend to overstate the rarity of extreme heat waves, leading to a biased perception of the effect of climate change on the heatwave event: “The tendency to overestimate the return period of observed extreme heatwave events may fuel the impression that seemingly impossible heatwave extremes are currently clustering at an unprecedented rate.”

The 2021 Western North America heatwave was a rare and unprecedented compound weather event that broke century-old temperature records by as much as 9°F. While the WWA team received worldwide publicity for their rapid attribution claims blaming anthropogenic climate change, subsequent peer-reviewed analyses showed that the event was caused by rare meteorological conditions that were not made more probable by global warming.

References

- Allen, M. R., & Tett, S. F. B. (1999). Checking for model consistency in optimal fingerprinting. *Climate Dynamics*, 15(6), 419–434. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s003820050291>"]
- AR4: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report (2021) Working Group I Contribution. [HYPERLINK "<http://www.ipcc.ch>"].

- AR5: *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report* (2021) Working Group I Contribution. [[HYPERLINK "http://www.ipcc.ch"](http://www.ipcc.ch)].
- AR6: *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report* (2021) Working Group I Contribution. [[HYPERLINK "http://www.ipcc.ch"](http://www.ipcc.ch)].
- Arthun, M, RCJ Willis, HL Johnson, L Chafik, HR Langehaug (2021) Mechanisms of Decadal North Atlantic Climate Variability and Implications for the Recent Cold Anomaly. *Journal of Climate*, Vol 34
- Balcombe, Kevin, Iain Fraser and Abhijit Sharma (2019) Is radiative forcing cointegrated with temperature? A further examination using a structural time series approach.” *Management of Environmental Quality* 30(5) DOI 10.1108/MEQ-12-2018-021.
- Barlow, Anna Maria, Chris Sherlock and Jonathan Tawn (2020) Inference for Extreme Values Under Threshold-Based Stopping Rules. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series C* August 2020, Pages 765–789, [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1111/rssc.12420"](https://doi.org/10.1111/rssc.12420)]
- Bednarz, EW, AH Butler, X Wang, Z Zhou, W Yu, G Stenchikov, M Toohey, Y Zhu (2025) Indirect climate impacts of the Hunga eruption. Preprint, <https://doi.org/10.5194/egusphere-2025-1970>
- Bercos-Hickey, E., *et al.* (2022). Anthropogenic contributions to the 2021 Pacific Northwest heatwave. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 49(23), e2022GL099396. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1029/2022GL099396"](https://doi.org/10.1029/2022GL099396)]
- Bokuchava, DD and VV Semenov (2021) Mechanisms of the early 20th century warming in the Arctic. *Earth-Science Reviews*, 222, 103820
- Chatzistergos, T., Krivova, N. A., & Yeo, K. L. (2023). Long-term changes in solar activity and irradiance. *Journal of Atmospheric and Solar-Terrestrial Physics*, 252, 106150. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jastp.2023.106150"](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jastp.2023.106150)]
- Chen, C., & Liu, L.-M. (1993). Joint estimation of model parameters and outlier effects in time series. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 88(421), 284–297. [[HYPERLINK "http://www.jstor.org/stable/2290724"](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2290724)]
- Chen, L., J.J. Dolado, J. Gonzalo and A. Ramos (2023) Heterogeneous predictive association of CO2 with global warming. *Economica* 2023 90:1397–1421 DOI: 10.1111/ecca.12491
- Chylek, P., *et al.* (2016). The role of Atlantic Multi-Decadal Oscillation in the global mean temperature variability. *Climate Dynamics*, 47(9–10), 3271–3279. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-016-3025-7"](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-016-3025-7)]
- Connolly, R., *et al.* (2021). How much has the sun influenced Northern Hemisphere temperature trends? An ongoing debate. *Research in Astronomy and Astrophysics*, 21(6), 131. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1088/1674-4527/21/6/131"](https://doi.org/10.1088/1674-4527/21/6/131)]
- Cramer, W., *et al.* (2014). Detection and attribution of observed impacts. In C. B. Field *et al.* (Eds.), *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects* (pp. 979–1037). Cambridge University Press.
- Dagsvik, JK SH Moen (2023) To what extent are temperature levels changing due to greenhouse gas emissions? Statistics Norway Discussion Paper 1007 September 2023
- Dagsvik, JK, M Fortuna and SH Moen (2020) How Does Temperature Vary Over Time?: Evidence on the Stationary and Fractal Nature of Temperature Fluctuations. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series A: Statistics in Society*, Volume 183, Issue 3, June 2020, Pages 883–908, [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1111/rssa.12557"](https://doi.org/10.1111/rssa.12557)]
- Davidson, James E.H., David B. Stephenson and Alemtsehai A. Turasie (2015) Time series modeling of paleoclimate data *Environmetrics* 27(1) [[HYPERLINK "https://online.library.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/env.2373"](https://online.library.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/env.2373)]

- Dergiades, T., R.K. Kaufmann and T. Panagiotidis (2016). Long-run changes in radiative forcing and surface temperature: The effect of human activity over the last five centuries. *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management* 76:67—85. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0095069615000911>"]
- England, Mark, Lorenzo M Polvani, James A Screen, et al (2025). Surprising, but not unexpected, multi-decadal pause in Arctic sea ice loss. *ESS Open Archive*. March 29, 2025.
- Fleishman, E., editor. (2023). Sixth Oregon Climate Assessment. Oregon Climate Change Research Institute, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon. [HYPERLINK "<https://blogs.oregonstate.edu/occri/oregon-climate-assessments>"]
- Frajka-Williams, E, C Beaulieu, Aurelie Duchez (2017) Emerging negative Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation index in spite of warm subtropics. *Scientific Reports*, 7:11224
- Goessling, Helge F. Thomas Rackow and Thomas Jung (2024) Recent global temperature surge intensified by record-low planetary albedo. *Science* Vol 387, Issue 6729 pp. 68-73 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.science.org/doi/abs/10.1126/science.adq7280>"]
- Gulev, S. K., *et al.* (2021). Changing state of the climate system. In V. Masson-Delmotte *et al.* (Eds.), *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (pp. 287–422). Geneva: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- Hansen J and P Karecha (2025) Large cloud feedback confirms high sensitivity.
- Hegerl, G. C., *et al.* (2007). Understanding and attributing climate change. In S. Solomon *et al.* (Eds.), *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (pp. 663–745). Cambridge University Press.
- Hegerl, GC, S Bronniman, A Schurer *et al.* (2017) Early 20th century warming: Anomalies, causes and consequences. *WIREs Climate Change*, DOI: 10.1002/wcc.522
- Hegerl, GC, S Bronniman, T Cowan (2019) Causes of climate change over the historical record. *Environmental Research Letters*, 14, 123006
- Hodnebrog, Ø *et al.* (2024), Recent reductions in aerosol emissions have increased Earth's energy imbalance. *Communications Earth and Environment* 5, 166 (2024). doi:10.1038/s43247-024-01324-8
- Houghton, J. T., *et al.* (Eds.). (2001). *Climate Change 2001: The Scientific Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (pp. 1–881). Cambridge University Press.
- [HYPERLINK "<https://mailchi.mp/caa/large-cloud-feedback-confirms-high-climate-sensitivity>"]
- Kravtsov, S., Westgate, A., & Gavrilov, A. (2024). Global-scale multidecadal variability in climate models and observations, part II: The stadium wave. *Climate Dynamics*, 62, 10281–10306. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-024-07451-4>"]
- Kuchar, A., Sukhodolov, T., Chiodo, G., Jörimann, A., Kult-Herdin, J., Rozanov, E., and Rieder, H. H. (2025): Modulation of the northern polar vortex by the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai eruption and the associated surface response, *Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics*, 25, 3623–3634, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.5194/acp-25-3623-2025>"].
- Lewis, Nicholas (2023) “Objectively Combining Climate Sensitivity Evidence,” *Climate Dynamics* 61, no. 9–10 (2023): 3155–3163, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-022-06398-8>"].
- Lockwood, M. (2012). Solar influence on global and regional climates. *Surveys in Geophysics*, 33(3–4), 503–534. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10712-012-9181-3>"]

- Loeb, N. G. *et al.* (2019) Decomposing Shortwave Top-of-Atmosphere and Surface Radiative Flux Variations in Terms of Surface and Atmospheric Contributions. *Journal of Climate* 32(16), 5003-5019 (2019). doi:10.1175/JCLI-D-18-0826.1
- Loeb, N., S-H Ham, RP Allen, TJ Thorsen, B Meyssignac, S Kato, GC Johnson, JL Lyman (2024) Observational Assessment of Changes in Earth's Energy Budget since 2000. *Surveys in Geophysics*, 45, 1757-1783
- Mass, C., *et al.* (2024). The Pacific Northwest heat wave of 25–30 June 2021: Synoptic/mesoscale conditions and climate perspective. *Weather and Forecasting*, 39(2), 275–291. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1175/WAF-D-23-0154.1"](https://doi.org/10.1175/WAF-D-23-0154.1)]
- Matthes, K., *et al.* (2017). Solar forcing for CMIP6 (v3.2). *Geoscientific Model Development*, 10(6), 2247–2302. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.5194/gmd-10-2247-2017"](https://doi.org/10.5194/gmd-10-2247-2017)]
- McKinnon, K. and I. Simpson (2022) How Unexpected Was the 2021 Pacific Northwest Heatwave? *Geophysical Research Letters*, 49, e2022GL100380. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1029/2022GL100380"](https://doi.org/10.1029/2022GL100380)]
- McKinnon, K. and I. Simpson (2022) How Unexpected Was the 2021 Pacific Northwest Heatwave? *Geophysical Research Letters*, 49, e2022GL100380. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1029/2022GL100380"](https://doi.org/10.1029/2022GL100380)]
- McKittrick, R. (2021). Checking for model consistency in optimal fingerprinting: A comment. *Climate Dynamics*, 58(1–2), 405–411. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-021-05913-7"](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-021-05913-7)]
- McKittrick, R. (2023). Total least squares bias in climate fingerprinting regressions with heterogeneous noise variances and correlated explanatory variables. *Environmetrics*, 35(2), e2835. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1002/env.2835"](https://doi.org/10.1002/env.2835)]
- McKittrick, Ross R (2022) [[HYPERLINK "https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00382-022-06315-z"](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00382-022-06315-z)] *Climate Dynamics* 10.1007/s00382-022-06315-z
- McKittrick, Ross R (2025) Consistent Climate Fingerprinting. *Climate Dynamics* forthcoming preprint available at [[HYPERLINK "http://www.rossmckittrick.com"](http://www.rossmckittrick.com)]
- McLean, J.D., C. R. de Freitas, and R. M. Carter, (2009) “Influence of the Southern Oscillation on Tropospheric Temperature,” *Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres* 114, no. D14 (July 23, 2009): D14104, <https://doi.org/10.1029/2008JD011637>.
- Miralles, O., & Davison, A. (2023). Timing and spatial selection bias in rapid extreme event attribution. *Weather and Climate Extremes*, 41, 100...
- Miralles, Ophélie and Anthony Davison (2023) Timing and spatial selection bias in rapid extreme event attribution. *Weather and Climate Extremes* 41 100584 [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wace.2023.100584"](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wace.2023.100584)]
- Myhre, G., D. Shindell, F.-M. Bréon, et al (2013): Anthropogenic and Natural Radiative Forcing. In: *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Stocker, T.F., *et al.* (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA.
- Nissan, Hannah, Lisa Goddard, Erin Coughlan de Perez, *et al.* (2019) On the use and misuse of climate change projections in international development. *Wires Climate Change* 14 March 2019 [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.579"](https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.579)]
- Palmer, Tim N and Bjorn Stevens (2019) The scientific challenge of understanding and estimating climate change. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116 (49) 24390-24395 [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1906691116"](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1906691116)]
- Pearl, J. (2009). *Causality*. Cambridge University Press.

- Philip, S. Y., *et al.* (2022). Rapid attribution analysis of the extraordinary heatwave on the Pacific coast of the U.S. and Canada June 2021. *Earth System Dynamics*, 13(4), 1689–1713. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.5194/esd-13-1689-2022"]
- Pielke Jr., Roger (2024) Weather Attribution Alchemy. Substack essay [HYPERLINK "https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/weather-attribution-alchemy"]
- Ranasinghe, R., Ruane, A. C., Vautard, R., Arnell, N., Coppola, E., Cruz, F. A., ... Zaaboul, R. (2021). Chapter 12: Climate change information for regional impact and for risk assessment. In V. Masson-Delmotte *et al.* (Eds.), *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (pp. 1767–1926). Cambridge University Press. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157896.014"]
- Razzak, Weshah A. (2022). "The Econometrics of Global Warming," *Journal of Economics and Econometrics*, vol. 65(2), pages 13-47.
- Sardeshmukh, P. D., Compo, G. P., & Penland, C. (2015). Need for caution in interpreting extreme weather statistics. *Journal of Climate*, 28(23), 9166–9187. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1175/JCLI-D-15-0020.1"]
- Scafetta, N. (2013). Discussion on climate oscillations: CMIP5 general circulation models versus a semi-empirical harmonic model based on astronomical cycles. *Earth-Science Reviews*, 126, 321
- Scaffeta, Nicola (2021) "Reconstruction of the Interannual to Millennial Scale Patterns of the Global Surface Temperature," *Atmosphere* 12, no. 2: 147, [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.3390/atmos12020147"]
- Schmidt, G. (2024) Climate models can't explain 2023's huge heat anomaly — we could be in uncharted territory. *Nature* 627, 467. [HYPERLINK "https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-00816-z"]
- Schmutz, Werner K. (2021) "Changes in the Total Solar Irradiance and Climatic Effects," *Journal of Space Weather and Space Climate* 11:40, <https://doi.org/10.1051/swsc/2021016>.
- Seneviratne, S. *et al.* (2021) "Chapter 11: Weather and Climate Extreme Events in a Changing Climate." In *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, edited by V. Masson-Delmotte, P. Zhai, A. Pirani, S.L. Connors, C. Péan, S. Berger, N. Caud, *et al.*, 1513–1766. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157896.013>.
- Solanki, S.K. *et al.* (2004), "Unusual Activity of the Sun during Recent Decades Compared to the Previous 11,000 Years," *Nature* 431, no. 7012 (October 28, 2004): 1084–1087, [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1038/nature02995"].
- Stefani, Frank (2021) "Solar and Anthropogenic Influences on Climate: Regression Analysis and Tentative Predictions," *Climate* 9, no. 11 (November 3, 2021): 163, [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.3390/cli9110163"].
- Thompson, DJW, JM Wallace, JJ Kennedy, PD Jones (2010) An abrupt drop in Northern Hemisphere Sea Surface Temperature around 1970. *Nature*, 467, 444-447
- Tokinaga, H, SP Xie, and H Mukougawa (2017) Early 20th century Arctic warming intensified by Pacific and Atlantic multidecadal variability. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114, 6227-6233 [HYPERLINK "https://www.pnas.org/doi/abs/10.1073/pnas.1615880114"]
- Tung, Ka-Kit and Jiansong Zhou (2013) "Using Data to Attribute Episodes of Warming and Cooling in Instrumental Records," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110, no. 6 (January 23, 2013): 2058–2063, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1212471110>.

- Usoskin, I.G., S. K. Solanki, and G. A. Kovaltsov (2007) “Grand Minima and Maxima of Solar Activity: New Observational Constraints,” *Astronomy & Astrophysics* 471, no. 1 (June 6, 2007): 301–309, [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1051/0004-6361:20077704>"].
- Velasco Herrera, V.M., B. Mendoza, and G. Velasco Herrera (2015) “Reconstruction and Prediction of the Total Solar Irradiance: From the Medieval Warm Period to the 21st Century,” *New Astronomy* 34 (January 2015): 221–233, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newast.2014.07.009>.
- Visser, H. and A.C. Petersen (2012) Inferences on weather extremes and weather-related disasters: a review of statistical methods *Climates of the Past* 8, 265–286 [HYPERLINK "<https://cp.copernicus.org/articles/8/265/2012/cp-8-265-2012.pdf>"]
- World Weather Attribution (2021) “Western North American Extreme Heat Virtually Impossible without Human-Caused Climate Change.” July 7, 2021. <https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/western-north-american-extreme-heat-virtually-impossible-without-human-caused-climate-change/>.
- Yuan, *et al.* (2024) Abrupt reduction in shipping emission as an inadvertent geoengineering termination shock produces substantial radiative warming. *Communications Earth and Environment* 5, 281 (2024). doi:10.1038/s43247-024-01442-3
- Zeder, J., Sippel, S., Pasche, O. C., Engelke, S., & Fischer, E. M. (2023). The effect of a short observational record on the statistics of temperature extremes. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 50, e2023GL104090. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1029/2023GL104090>"]

PART III: IMPACTS ON ECOSYSTEMS AND SOCIETY

9 CLIMATE CHANGE AND U.S. AGRICULTURE

Chapter summary

There has been abundant evidence going back decades that rising CO₂ levels benefit plants, including agricultural crops, and that CO₂-induced warming will be a net benefit to U.S. agriculture. The warming since 1981, in combination with adaptive behavior by farmers, has been beneficial for maize. The increased ambient CO₂ has also boosted productivity of all major U.S. crop types. Various attempts to argue that CO₂-induced warming will harm agriculture do not hold up under scrutiny.

9.1 Econometric analyses

Econometric analyses of the effects of climate change on agriculture have sought to integrate information about long term crop yield changes in response to temperature and precipitation changes under assumptions about adaptive behavior by farmers. One method focuses on variations in agricultural land values. The rationale is that if climate change is a long-term net benefit for agriculture it should be capitalized into higher market values for agricultural land, and vice versa. While individual crops might benefit from or be harmed by climate change, once the adaptive responses of farmers are considered the value of farmland represents an index of whether the changes are expected to be beneficial or not. Mendelsohn *et al.* (1994) examined the relationship between historical climatic variations on agricultural land values and concluded global warming would be slightly beneficial to American agriculture.

The Mendelsohn *et al.* method, called Ricardian analysis after David Ricardo, the 19th century British economist who pioneered the study of land values, attracted subsequent criticism from authors who argued it failed to account for differences in land values attributable to fixed locational characteristics like soil quality, and non-climatic changes including nearby urbanization. Deschênes and Greenstone (2007) looked at agricultural profits instead of land values and reached conclusions similar to Mendelsohn *et al.* (1994), namely that past climatic variations had relatively little effect on farm profitability and that warming would likely yield small overall benefits for the U.S. agricultural sector. However, a subsequent exchange with critics led them (Deschênes and Greenstone 2012) to revise their conclusions and project potentially large losses in U.S. agriculture due to climate warming.

Burke and Emerick (2016) looked at temperature variations over 1980 to 2000 and argued that farmers were not as able to adapt to temperature changes as the Ricardian method assumes and that climate change would have large negative impacts on corn and soy yields. Schlenker and Roberts (2009) similarly argued that yield gains to past warming would not carry over to the future and corn and soy yields would sharply decrease this century due to climate change.

Two recent studies have argued that pessimistic findings such as these are not robust. Ortiz-Bobea (2019) argued that land values aggregate farm and non-farm influences and the latter need to be filtered out. He developed a data set using cash rents for agricultural activity as a measure of land value specifically for farming activity. Whereas the land value model implied future losses under climate warming, the same model estimated using cash rents did not, leading the author to conclude the pessimistic results were due to using an inaccurate measure of the returns to farming activity. Bareille and Chakir (2023) assembled a large data base on farm sale prices in France for properties that sold twice between 1996 and 2019. They could replicate pessimistic results showing negative effects of warming on agricultural land values using conventional econometric modeling. But by taking advantage of the repeat sales data, which provides information on site-specific changes in land prices, they found the results reversed and implied that climate change will be very beneficial for French agriculture. The authors concluded that, taking adaptation into account, a warming climate would yield positive benefits for French agriculture that were between two and

20 times larger than had previously been estimated. On average, with full adaptation, they concluded that climate changes under the medium RCP4.5 scenario could double the value of French farmland by 2100.

A major deficiency of all these studies, however, is that they omit the role of CO₂ fertilization. Climate change as it relates to this report is caused by GHG emissions, chiefly CO₂. The econometric analyses referenced above focus only on temperature and precipitation changes and do not take account of the beneficial growth effect of the additional CO₂ that drives them. As explained in Chapter 2, CO₂ is a major driver of plant growth, so this omission biases the analysis towards underestimation of the benefits of climate change to agriculture.

9.2 Field studies of CO₂ enrichment

One of the ways the effect of CO₂ on crop growth has been studied is through “free air enrichment experiments” or FACE plots, in which small sources of CO₂ are placed in fields surrounding plants and the growth response to elevated CO₂ under varying weather conditions are recorded. Ainsworth *et al.* (2020) summarizes results from about 250 such studies. They found that elevation of CO₂ by 200 ppm caused an average 18 percent increase in crop yield in C3 plants. C4 plants exhibited benefits mainly under drought conditions.

In addition to FACE plot experiments there have been thousands of laboratory experiments on the effects of CO₂ on all kinds of plant growth. Here we review some of the results on key U.S. agricultural crops.

Soybean

Studies on the impact of elevated CO₂ on Soybean (*Glycine max* (L.) Merr.) plants in the water-deficient region of Huang-Huai-Hai Plain, China, showed that elevated CO₂ concentrations improved photosynthesis rate, water use efficiency, and growth Li (2013) under both normal conditions and drought conditions. The CO2Science.org website reports on 108 published experiments between 1985 and 2019 exposing soybean to enriched CO₂ levels. Converted to a +300ppm common scale the average growth benefit was +50.9 percent. There were also ten studies reporting on +600 ppm CO₂ enrichment, which increased photosynthesis by an average of 90.3%.

Maize (corn)

The CO2Science.org website reports on 28 published experiments between 1983 and 2018 exposing corn (*Zea mays* L.) to enriched CO₂ levels. Converted to a +300ppm common scale the average growth benefit was +23.7 percent. Corn also benefits from increased drought tolerance under elevated CO₂. An experimental study (Allen Jr., 2011) exposed plants to water stress conditions in sunlit controlled-environment chambers at 360 ppm (ambient) and 720 ppm (elevated) CO₂. The drought stress caused a 41 percent loss of growth under ambient CO₂ but only a 13 percent loss under elevated CO₂.

Wheat

The CO2Science.org website reports on 92 published experiments between 1983 and 2020 exposing common wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) to enriched CO₂ levels. Converted to a +300ppm common scale the average growth benefit was +67.6 percent. Blandino (2020) measured both the yield and nutritional quality of an “improver” hybrid wheat variety and its parents under elevated CO₂ levels (+166 ppm). They reported a grain yield increase of +16 percent but a 7 percent decrease in grain protein levels. But they found that the food quality of different wheat varieties responded differently to elevated CO₂ levels, so that with proper varietal selection, growers could select wheat types that best take advantage of the elevated CO₂.

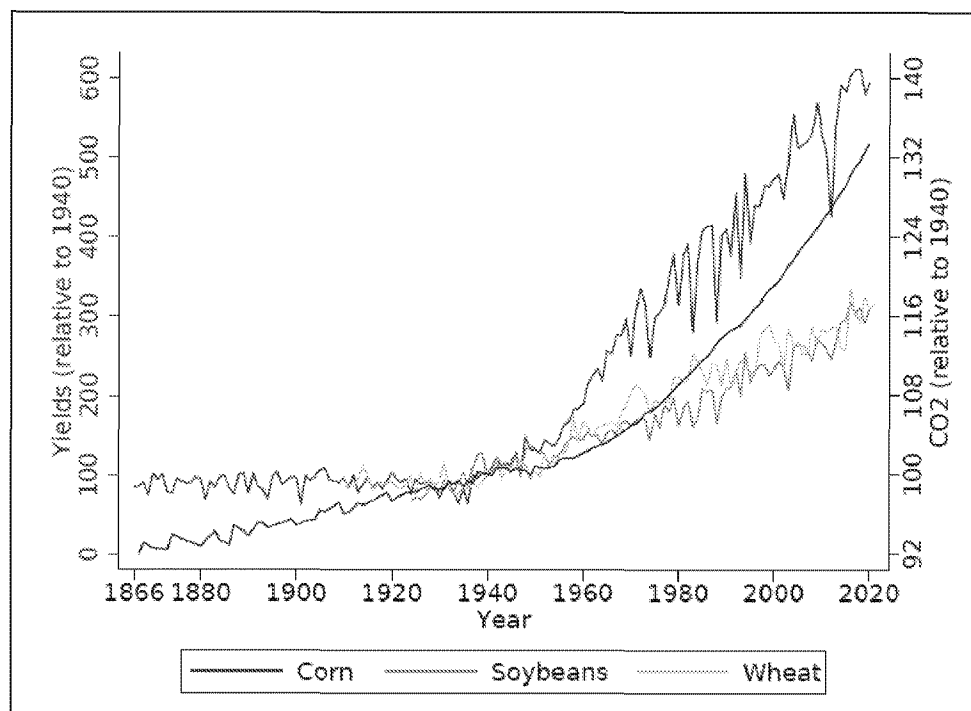


Figure 9.1: U.S. average CO₂ levels and yields of corn, soy and wheat all normalized so 1940=100. Source: Taylor and Schlenker (2021)

Further evidence

A 2021 report from the U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research (Taylor and Schlenker 2021) used satellite-measured observations of outdoor CO₂ levels across the United States, matched to county-level agricultural output data and other economic variables. After controlling for the effects of weather, pollution and technology the authors concluded that CO₂ emissions had boosted U.S. crop production since 1940 by 50 to 80 percent, attributing much larger gains than had previously been estimated using FACE experiments. They found that every ppm of increase in CO₂ concentration boosts corn yields by 0.5 percent, soybeans by 0.6 percent, and wheat by 0.8 percent.

Beyond growth benefits, extra CO₂ boosts plant resilience to dryness. Deryng *et al.* (2016) surveyed evidence on crop water productivity (CWP, the yield per unit of water used), drawing attention to the potential for CO₂ both to enhance photosynthesis and reduce leaf-level transpiration (water loss during leaf respiration). They surveyed all available FACE data on crop yield changes for maize (corn), wheat, rice and soybean, and combined it with crop model data simulating yield responses as of 2080 under the extreme RCP8.5 scenario in four growing regions (Tropics, Arid, Temperate and Cold) each of which were split into rainfed and irrigated sub-regions. In every region they reported that models without CO₂ fertilization predicted CWP losses but CO₂ fertilization more than offset them; once fertilization was taken into account, all regions showed a net CWP gain. Deryng *et al.* also reported that negative yield impacts on wheat and soybean were fully offset by CWP gains and mitigated by up to 90 percent for rice and 60 percent for maize. Similarly, Cheng *et al.* (2017) noted that increased global plant growth from 1982 to 2011 due to rising CO₂ uptake was accompanied by such large gains in CWP that despite the extra biomass global water use by plants had not increased.

Deryng *et al.* (2016) assumed that climate change would “exacerbate water scarcity”. It is noteworthy that while models predict drylands will expand under climate warming, observations show the opposite: greening is happening even in arid areas. Zhang *et al.* (2024) report that due to increased CO₂ levels

“increasing aridity in drylands won’t lead to a general loss of vegetation productivity”; increased desertification will happen in at most 4 percent of currently arid areas.

9.3 Crop modeling meta-analyses

Notwithstanding the abundant evidence for the direct benefits of CO₂ and of CO₂-induced warming on crop growth, in 2023 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA 2023) boosted its estimate of the Social Cost of Carbon (SCC) about five-fold based in large part on a very pessimistic 2017 estimate of global agricultural damages from climate warming (Moore *et al.*, 2017). One of the two damage models used by the EPA attributed nearly half of the 2030 SCC to projected global agricultural damages based on the Moore *et al.* (2017) analysis. This study was a meta-analysis of crop model studies simulating yield changes for agricultural crops under various climate warming scenarios. Moore *et al.* projected declining global crop yields for all crop types in all regions due to warming.

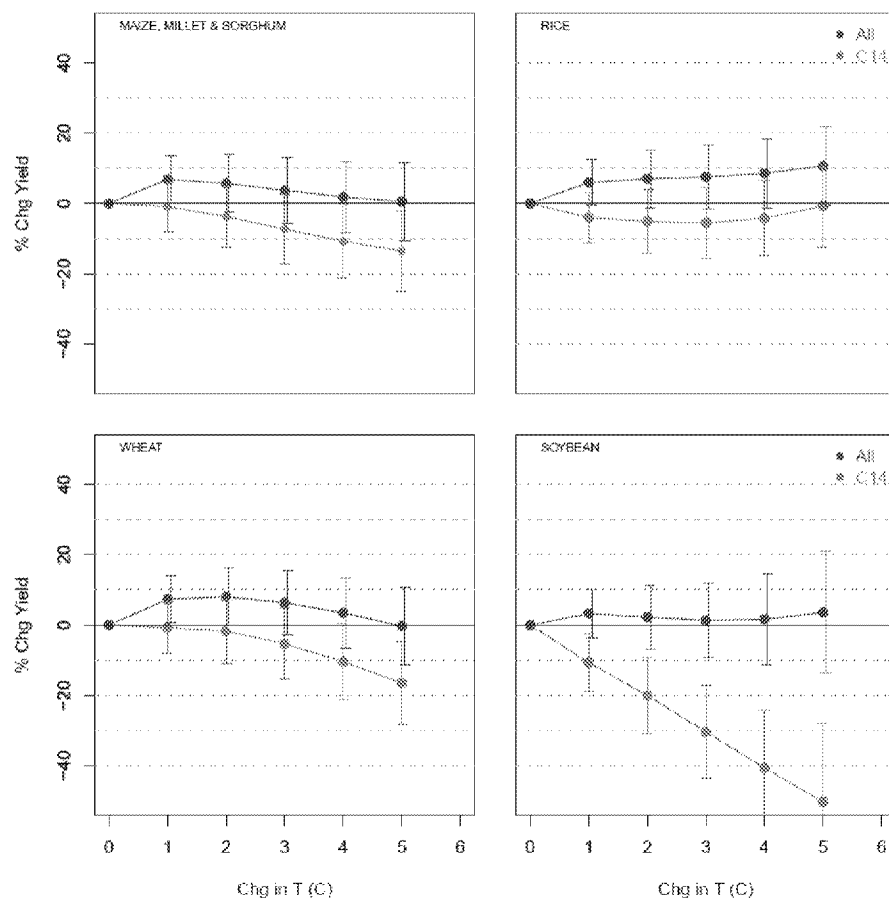


Figure 9.2 Crop yields under CO₂-induced climate warming. Blue: as published in Moore *et al.* (2017). Green: after including omitted data. Source: McKittrick (2025).

McKittrick (2025) re-examined the Moore *et al.* database and found that, while it claimed to cover 1,722 studies, only half the entries ($N=862$) had complete records, so that the sample available for regression analysis was much smaller than both studies indicated. McKittrick noted that the variable most commonly missing was the change in ambient CO₂ and found that in many cases these could be recovered from the underlying studies or the original climate scenario tables. He thereby increased the usable sample size by

40 percent. The crop yield projections incorporating the newly available data changed considerably. As shown in Figure 10.2, whereas the partial data set implied warming would decrease yield (blue lines), the complete data set implied constant or increase global yields, even out to 5°C warming (green lines).

In summary, there is abundant evidence going back decades that rising CO₂ levels benefit plants including agricultural crops, and that CO₂-induced warming will be a net benefit to U.S. agriculture.

References

- Ainsworth, Elizabeth and Stephen P. Long (2020) 30 years of free-air carbon dioxide enrichment (FACE): What have we learned about future crop productivity and its potential for adaptation? *Global Change Biology* [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.15375>"]
- Allen Jr, L. K. (2011). Elevated CO₂ increases water use efficiency by sustaining photosynthesis of water-limited maize and sorghum. *Journal of Plant physiology*, 168(16), 1909-1918.
- Bareille, F. and R. Chakir (2023) The impact of climate change on agriculture: A repeat-Ricardian analysis. *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management* 119
- Blandino, M. B. (2020). Elevated CO₂ impact on common wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) yield, wholemeal quality, and sanitary risk. *Journal of agricultural and food chemistry*, 68(39), 10574-10585.
- Burke, Marshall and Kyle Emerick (2016) Adaptation to Climate Change: Evidence from US Agriculture. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 8(3) August 2016 106—140 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/pol.20130025>"]
- Cheng, L., Zhang, L., Wang, YP. *et al.* Recent increases in terrestrial carbon uptake at little cost to the water cycle. *Nature Communications* 8, 110 (2017). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-017-00114-5>"]
- CO2Science.org (undated) Plant growth archive
http://www.co2science.org/data/plant_growth/dry/dry_subject_b.php
- Deryng, D., Elliott, J., Folberth, C. *et al.* (2021) Regional disparities in the beneficial effects of rising CO₂ concentrations on crop water productivity. *Nature Climate Change* 6, 786–790 (2016). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2995>"]
- Deschênes, Olivier and Michael Greenstone (2012) The Economic Impacts of Climate Change: Evidence from Agricultural Output and Random Fluctuations in Weather: Reply to Comment *American Economic Review*. 102, no. 7: 3761-3773. [HYPERLINK "<http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/82641>"]
- Li, D. L. (2013). Effects of elevated CO₂ on the growth, seed yield, and water use efficiency of soybean (*Glycine max* (L.) Merr.) under drought stress. *Agricultural Water Management*, 129, 105-112.
- McKittrick, Ross R. (2025) Extended Crop Yield Meta-analysis Data do not Support Upward SCC Revision. *Scientific Reports* 15 article 5575 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-025-90254-2>"]
- Mendelsohn, R., Nordhaus, W. D., & Shaw, D. (1994). The impact of global warming on agriculture: a Ricardian analysis. *The American Economic Review*, Sept 1994 753-771.
- Moore FC, Baldos U, Hertel T, Diaz D (2017) New science of climate change impacts on agriculture implies higher social cost of carbon. *Nature Communications* 8:1607. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-017-01792-x>
- Ortiz-Bobea, Ariel (2019) The role of nonfarm influences in ricardian estimates of climate change impacts on US agriculture. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*. 102 (3), 934–959.
- Schlenker, Wolfram and Michael Roberts (2009) Nonlinear temperature effects indicate severe damages to U.S. crop yields under climate change. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106 (37) 15594-15598 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0906865106>"]
- Taylor, Charles and Wolfram Schlenker (2023) Environmental drivers of agricultural productivity growth: CO₂ fertilization of US field crops. National Bureau of Economic Research Working paper 29320, [HYPERLINK "<http://www.nber.org/paper/w29320>"]

- US Environmental Protection Agency (2023) Supplementary Material for the Regulatory Impact Analysis for the Final Rulemaking, “Standards of Performance for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources and Emissions Guidelines for Existing Sources: Oil and Natural Gas Sector Climate Review”, EPA Report on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases: Estimates Incorporating Recent Scientific Advances, November 2023, [[HYPERLINK "https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-12/epa_scghg_2023_report_final.pdf"](https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-12/epa_scghg_2023_report_final.pdf)]
- Zhang *et al.* (2024) Less than 4% of dryland areas are projected to desertify despite increased aridity under climate change. *Nature Communications Earth and Environment* 5 June 2024 [[HYPERLINK "https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01463-y"](https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01463-y)]

10 MANAGING RISKS OF EXTREME WEATHER

Chapter summary

Trends in losses from extreme weather and climate events are dominated by population increases and economic growth. Technological advances such as improved weather forecasting and early warning systems have substantially reduced losses from extreme weather events. Better building codes, flood defenses, and disaster response mechanisms have lowered economic losses relative to GDP. The U.S. economy's expansion has diluted the relative impact of disaster costs, as seen in the comparison of historical and modern GDP percentages. Heat-related mortality risk has dropped substantially due to adaptive measures including the adoption of air conditioning, which relies on the availability of affordable energy. U.S. mortality risks even under extreme warming scenarios are not projected to increase if people are able to undertake adaptive responses.

10.1 Socioeconomic context

Risks from human-caused climate change are affected by natural weather and climate variability and are dominated by the exposure of wealth in coastal and other disaster-prone regions and vulnerabilities of poorer populations. The evolution of climate risk in the U.S. has been dominated by societal factors, rather than by changes to the actual weather and climate hazards. Deaths from weather disasters have decreased substantially since 1900, even as U.S. population grew from 76 million in 1900 to over 331 million in 2020 (Goklany 2011). For example, the Galveston hurricane killed over 8,000 people in 1900 (0.01 percent of the U.S. population), whereas the worst recent disaster, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, killed 1800 people (or 0.0006 percent of the U.S. population) (NOAA National Hurricane Center 2025; U.S. Census Bureau 2025).

Technological advances have substantially reduced losses from extreme weather events. Early warning systems, satellite monitoring, and improved weather forecasting have reduced deaths, although exact numbers are hard to quantify (Deryugina and Hsiang 2023). U.S. weather forecasting has been estimated to reduce losses from weather events with an annualized benefit of \$31.5B, protecting lives, property, and supporting agriculture and transportation (NRC 2010). Improved hurricane forecasts have reduced pre- and post-landfall spending, with annual per hurricane cost reductions estimated at \$5B (Molina and Rudik 2024).

Infrastructure improvements have contributed to substantial reductions in losses from extreme weather events. Building codes, such as those implemented in Florida after Hurricane Andrew (1992), have reduced losses by ensuring structures can withstand high winds and floods. Homes built after 2002 showed minimal damage during Hurricane Michael (2018), unlike older homes (FEMA 2020). Sea walls, like the Galveston Seawall, protect against wave action and storm surge. The New Orleans Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk Reduction System successfully mitigated storm surge during Hurricane Isaac (2012) (Battelle Memorial Institute 2013). Inland dams in the U.S. help control flooding by storing excess water during heavy rains. It is estimated that the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) dams prevent about \$309M in annual flood damage in the TVA region and along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers (TVA, 2025). During Hurricane Helene (2024), TVA's strategies prevented approximately \$406M in potential damages (APPA 2024).

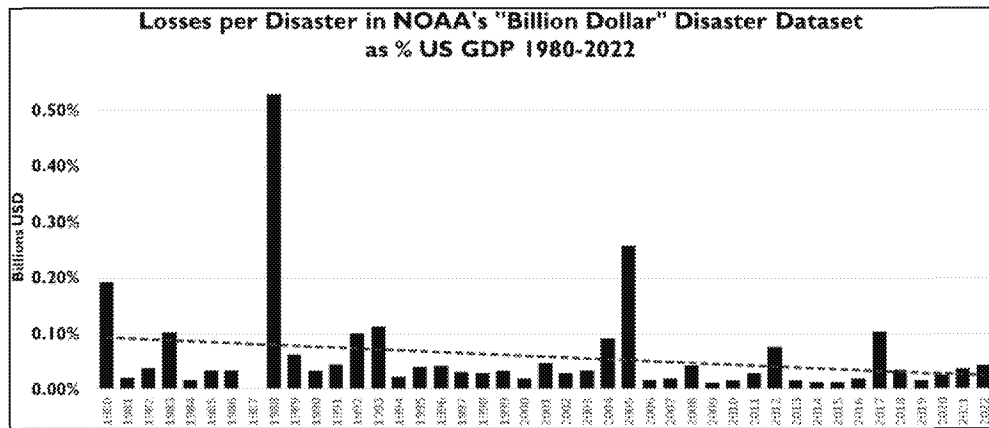


Figure 10.1: Losses per disaster in NOAA's billion-dollar disaster dataset (the version downloaded in July 2023), 1980 to 2022. Source: (Pielke, Jr. 2024)

10.2 Data challenges

Since 1980, NOAA has provided a count of annual U.S. weather-related disasters that it estimates to have exceeded \$1 Billion (inflation adjusted), showing a substantial increase starting in 2008. NOAA and other government officials have cited the upward trend in the Billion Dollar Disaster series as evidence that climate change is making extreme weather worse (Pielke Jr., 2024). But over time, population and wealth have increased dramatically in the U.S., so when an extreme weather or climate event occurs, there is more damage even if there is no underlying trend in the frequency or intensity of extreme weather. Pielke Jr. (2024) demonstrates that losses per weather disaster as a proportion of GDP have decreased by about 80 percent since 1980, as shown in Figure 10.1. Pielke Jr. (2024) also argued that in addition to relying on opaque data sources and unreported adjustments, NOAA failed to normalize its Billion Dollar Disaster data series properly for changes in population exposure and wealth. In May 2025 NOAA announced it has withdrawn the Billion Dollar Disaster product from publication (Pielke Jr., 2025).

In summary, trends in losses from extreme weather and climate events are dominated by population increases and economic growth. Technological advances such as improved weather forecasting and early warning systems have substantially reduced losses from extreme weather events. Better building codes, flood defenses, and disaster response mechanisms have lowered economic losses relative to GDP. Finally, the U.S. economy's expansion has diluted the relative impact of disaster costs, as seen in the comparison of historical and modern GDP percentages.

10.3 Mortality from temperature extremes

10.3.1 Heat and cold risks

Changes in temperature extremes are among the most certain impacts expected in a warming world. It stands to reason that extreme heat events would likely become more frequent while extreme cold events would become less frequent. This pattern is evident in the historical period though not in the continental U.S. (Chapter 6) and is expected to continue with further warming.

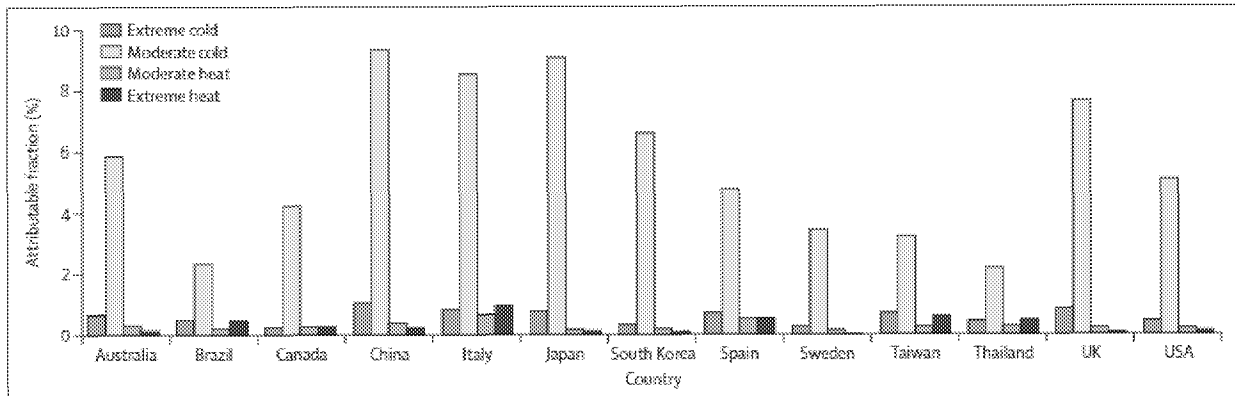


Figure 10.2. Mortality attributable to extreme and moderate cold and heat by country. Source: reproduced from Gasparini *et al.* (2015).

Mortality during heat extremes is typically caused by heat stroke and heat exhaustion, while mortality during cold extremes typically stems from hypothermia and heart strain. Global mortality is substantially greater for cold conditions than for hot conditions (Zhao *et al.* 2021, Ritchie 2024). Unlike with heat-related mortality cold-weather risks set in even at moderately cold conditions (Gasparini *et al.* 2015, Lee and Dessler 2023). The U.S. EPA (citing data from the Centers for Disease Control) reports that on average over 1999 to 2015 there were 2.2 deaths per million Americans for which cold was listed as the main underlying cause and an additional 2.4 deaths per million for which cold was listed as a contributing factor (EPA 2025). By contrast there were 1.3 deaths per million for which heat was the main cause and an additional 0.8 per million for which it was a contributor. By this metric cold accounts for approximately double the weather-related deaths as does heat.

Epidemiological methods, which consider correlational evidence not just death certificate reports, indicate the cold/warm ratio may be much higher. A 13-country study of 74 million deaths from 1985 to 2012 estimated that, on average, 7.7 percent of deaths were attributable to sub-optimal temperatures, of which 7.4 percent were attributable to cold and only 0.4 percent were attributable to heat (Gasparini *et al.* 2015). In other words, cold weather killed 18.5 times as many people as did hot weather.

Figure 10.2 shows the distribution of results from Gasparini *et al.* (2015) by country. For the United States the fraction of deaths attributable to temperature was 5.9 percent, of which 5.5 percent was due to cold, thus cold weather killed 14 times as many people as hot weather.

There is strong evidence that people adapt to weather risks. Lee and Dessler (2023) reported that 86 percent of temperature-related deaths across 40 cities in the U.S. were due to cold-related mortality, and that due to adaptation the relative risk of death declined in hot and cold cities alike as seasonal temperatures increased. Allen and Sheridan (2018) found that short, early-season cold events were 2 to 5 times deadlier than hot events, but the mortality risk of both cold and hot extremes drops to nearly zero if the events occur late in the season.

Davis *et al.* (2003) examined heat-related mortality in 28 U.S. cities from the 1960s to the end of the 1990s and found that heat-related mortality declined by three-quarters over the sample period. Bobb *et al.* (2014) examined mortality data for 106 million people in over 100 cities U.S. cities and found a 60 percent decline in average heat-related mortality over the period 1987—2005, from 51 per thousand deaths to 19. They furthermore found that the greatest drop was among seniors over the age of 75. In a study of 42 million deaths in 211 U.S. cities from 1962 to 2006, Nordio *et al.* (2015) found a more than 90 percent decline in the risk of mortality from excess heat.

In the context of large declines in heat-related mortality, by reducing mortality from cold events rising temperatures are associated with a net saving of lives.

The IPCC AR6 Working Group 2 Chapter 16.2.3.5 (O'Neill *et al.* 2022) acknowledges that heat-related mortality risk is declining over time:

Heat-attributable mortality fractions have declined over time in most countries owing to general improvements in health care systems, increasing prevalence of residential air conditioning, and behavioral changes. These factors, which determine the susceptibility of the population to heat, have predominated over the influence of temperature change.

It is both disappointing and telling to see how the IPCC misrepresents the situation in its AR6 Synthesis report. Section A.2.5 of that document states: “In all regions increases in extreme heat events have resulted in human mortality and morbidity (*very high confidence*).” But it is silent on the larger decline of deaths during extreme cold events.

The observed decline in U.S. heat-related mortality has been specifically attributed to adaptation. Wang *et al.* (2018) exploited the spatial variability of heatwave-related mortality across 209 U.S. cities from 1962 to 2006. While simple correlation appeared to imply an increase in mortality risk during heatwaves, accounting for adaptation to heatwave intensity caused the effect to fall to near zero and become statistically insignificant. They used the results of their epidemiological model to project heat-related mortality out to 2050 under four RCP warming scenarios (including RCP8.5) with and without adaptive behavior. Assuming people continue to adapt to the heatwave risks in the regions in which they live Wang *et al.* (2018) project not only no increase in heat-related mortality but an overall decrease for the U.S. as a whole. They conclude that

Ignoring adaptation would result in a substantial overestimate of future mortality related to heat waves... Accounting for adaptation, the overall heat-related mortality by 2050 would not change substantially over time compared to 2006.

10.3.2 Mortality risks and energy costs

A 2016 study of U.S. long term mortality risks associated with temperature variations (Barreca *et al.* 2016) showed that increases in mortality across the U.S. are associated with both cold weather and hot weather. But over time, the introduction of electricity and the adoption of central heating and air conditioning (AC) dramatically reduced both risks, especially those associated with hot weather. Prior to 1960, a day above 90°F (32°C) added 2.2 percent to the average mortality risk rate, but after 1960 the same weather added only 0.3 percent to mortality risk, an 85 percent reduction. Prior to 1960 temperatures below 39°F (4°C) added about 1 percent to mortality risk but after 1960 the same weather only added about half that amount. Adaptation through conventional household improvements dramatically reduced public vulnerability to weather extremes. The entire reduction in hot weather mortality was attributable to widespread adoption of indoor AC, which depended on the availability of reliable and affordable electricity.

The corollary of this finding is that the use of heating and cooling systems depends on energy being affordable. Doremus *et al.* (2022) showed that wealthy and poor households in the U.S. adjust their energy

expenditures at similar rates in response to moderate temperature swings, but not in response to extreme temperature swings. When temperatures swing to very cold levels ($< 5^{\circ}\text{C}$) energy spending in high-income households rises by 1.2 percent but in low-income households by only 0.5 percent. On very hot days ($> 30^{\circ}\text{C}$) electricity spending in high-income households rises by 0.5 percent but does not change at all in low-income households. The latter result is observed even in subsamples where all households have AC. The implication is that even with widespread adoption of home heating and cooling systems, inability to afford energy leaves low-income households exposed to weather extremes.

References

- Allen, M.J. and S.C. Sheridan (2018) Mortality risks during extreme temperature events (ETEs) using a distributed lag non-linear model. (2018) *International Journal of Biometeorology* 62, 57–67 (2018). [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00484-015-1117-4>"]
- American Public Power Association. (APPA, 2024, March 7). TVA flood mitigation strategies prevented approximately \$406 million in potential damages. Public Power Current. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.publicpower.org/periodical/article/tva-flood-mitigation-strategies-prevented-approximately-406-million-potential-damages>" \t "_new"]
- Barreca, Alan, Karen Clay, Olivier Deschenes, Michael Greenstone, and Joseph S Shapiro (2016), “Adapting to climate change: The remarkable decline in the US temperature mortality relationship over the twentieth century,” *Journal of Political Economy*, 2016, 124 (1), 105–159.
- Battelle Memorial Institute. (2013, December). Final independent external peer review report: Hurricane Isaac (2012) assessment (Prepared for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District). [HYPERLINK "<https://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/Portals/56/docs/PD/PeerReview/TCN13-003HurrlsaacAssessIEPRFinal.pdf>" \t "_new"]
- Bobb JF, RD Peng, ML Bell and F Dominici (2014) Heat-related mortality and adaptation to heat in the United States. *Environmental Health Perspectives* 122:811–816; [HYPERLINK "<https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/full/10.1289/ehp.1307392>"]
- Davis, Robert E., Paul C. Knappenberger, Patrick J. Michaels and Wendy M. Novicoff (2003) “Changing Heat-Related Mortality in the United States” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 111(14) November 2003 pp. 1712—1718 [HYPERLINK "<https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/pdf/10.1289/ehp.6336>"]
- Deryugina, T., & Hsiang, S. M. (2023). Does the environment still matter? Daily temperature and income in the United States (NBER Working Paper No. 31361). National Bureau of Economic Research. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nber.org/papers/w31361>" \t "_new"]
- Doremus, JM, I. Jacqz and S. Johnston (2022), “Sweating the energy bill: Extreme weather, poor households, and the energy spending gap.” *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, doi: [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeem.2022.102609>"].
- Environmental Protection Agency (2025) Climate Change Indicators. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/view-indicators>"]
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). (2020, February 13). The role of Florida’s building codes in Hurricane Michael recovery. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.fema.gov/case-study/role-floridas-building-codes-2018-hurricane-michael>" \t "_new"]
- Gasparini, A., Y. Guo, M. Hashizume *et al.* (2015) Mortality risk attributable to high and low ambient temperature: a multicountry observational study. *The Lancet* 386: 369-385 July 25, 2015 [HYPERLINK "[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(14\)62114-0](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(14)62114-0)"]

- Goklany, I. M. (2011). Deaths from extreme weather events, 1900–2010. Reason Foundation. [HYPERLINK "https://a8d50b36.delivery.rocketcdn.me/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/deaths_from_extreme_weather_1900_2010.pdf" \t "_new"]
- Lee, Jangho and Andrew Dessler (2023) Future Temperature-Related Deaths in the U.S.: The Impact of Climate Change, Demographics, and Adaptation. *GeoHealth* 7(8) August 2023 [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1029/2023GH000799"]
- Molina, R and I Rudik (2024) The value of improving hurricane forecasts. *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper* 32548 June 2024. [HYPERLINK "https://www.nber.org/digest/202409/value-improving-hurricane-forecasts"]
- National Hurricane Center. (n.d.). Costliest U.S. tropical cyclones tables updated. NOAA National Hurricane Center. Retrieved May 8, 2025, from [HYPERLINK "https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/outreach/history/" \t "_new"]
- National Research Council. (2010). Adapting to the impacts of climate change. The National Academies Press. [HYPERLINK "https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/12888/chapter/2" \t "_new"]
- Nordio, Francesco, Antonella Zanobetti, Elena Colicino, Itai Kloog and Joel Schwartz (2015). “Changing patterns of the temperature–mortality association by time and location in the US, and implications for climate change” *Environment International* Volume 81, pp 80-86 [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2015.04.009"].
- O'Neill, B., *et al.* (2022). Key risks across sectors and regions. In AR6 Working Group II *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability* (pp. 2411–2538). Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. [HYPERLINK "http://www.ipcc.ch"]
- Pielke Jr., R. (2024). Scientific integrity and U.S. 'billion dollar disasters'. *npj Natural Hazards*, 1, Article 12. [HYPERLINK "https://www.nature.com/articles/s44304-024-00011-0" \t "_new"]
- Pielke Jr., R. (2025, May 8). RIP NOAA's billion dollar disasters. The Honest Broker [Substack]. [HYPERLINK "https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/rip-noaas-billion-dollar-disasters" \t "_new"]
- Ritchie, H. (2024). How many people die from extreme temperatures, and how this could change in the future: Part one. Our World in Data. [HYPERLINK "https://ourworldindata.org/part-one-how-many-people-die-from-extreme-temperatures-and-how-could-this-change-in-the-future" \t "_new"]
- Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). (n.d.). Flood management. Retrieved May 8, 2025, from [HYPERLINK "https://www.tva.com/environment/managing-the-river/flood-management" \t "_new"]
- U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). Decennial census by decade. Retrieved May 8, 2025, from [HYPERLINK "https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade.html" \t "_new"]
- Wang, Yan, Francesco Nordio, John Nairn, Antonella Zanobetti and Joel D. Schwartz (2018) “Accounting for adaptation and intensity in projecting heat wave-related mortality” *Environmental Research* 161 pp. 464–471. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2017.11.049"]
- Zhao, Q., *et al.* (2021). Global, regional, and national burden of mortality associated with non-optimal ambient temperatures from 2000 to 2019: A three-stage modelling study. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 5(7). [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1016/s2542-5196(21)00081-4" \t "_new"]

11 CLIMATE CHANGE, THE ECONOMY, AND THE SOCIAL COST OF CARBON

Chapter summary

Economists have long considered climate a relatively unimportant factor in economic growth, a view echoed by the IPCC itself in the AR5. Mainstream climate economics has recognized that CO₂-induced warming may have some negative economic effects but they are too small to justify aggressive abatement policy and that trying to “stop” or cap global warming even at levels well above the Paris target would be worse than doing nothing. An influential study in 2012 suggested that global warming would harm growth in poor countries, but the finding has subsequently been found not to be robust. Studies that take full account of modeling uncertainties either find no evidence of a negative effect on global growth from CO₂ emissions or find poor countries as likely to benefit from it as rich countries.

Social Cost of Carbon (SCC) estimates are highly uncertain due to unknowns in future economic growth, socioeconomic pathways, discount rates, climate damages, and system responses. The SCC is not intrinsically informative as to the economic or societal impacts of climate change. It provides an index connecting large networks of assumptions about the climate and the economy to a dollar value. Some assumptions yield a high SCC and others yield a low or negative SCC (i.e. a social benefit of emissions). The evidence for or against the underlying assumptions needs to be established independently; the resulting SCC adds no additional information about the validity of those assumptions. Consideration of potential tipping points at present does not justify major revisions to SCC estimates.

11.1 Climate change and economic growth

11.1.1 Overview: climate is a relatively minor issue for a modern economy

It has long been noted that economies tend to do poorly in very cold and very hot regions, with the optimum somewhere in between (Nordhaus, 2006). Temperature-sensitive economic activity migrates, whenever possible, to where it is best suited, and society always adapts to the local climate. Based in part on these observations, in 1992 Thomas Schelling, then President of the American Economic Association, argued that any effects of climate change on U.S. economic activity would be small relative to the many other changes that would happen.

... Manufacturing rarely depends on climate, and where temperature and humidity used to make a difference, air conditioning has intervened. When Toyota chooses among Ohio, Alabama, and

Southern California for locating an automobile assembly, geographical considerations are important, but not because of climate... Finance is little affected by climate; similarly for health care, or education, or broadcasting. Transportation can be affected, but improvements in all-weather landing and take-off in the last 30 years are greater than any differences that climate makes. If the average effect is a warming, iced waterways and snow removal may decline in importance. Construction is affected, mainly by cold, and if the average effect is in the direction of warming, construction may benefit slightly.

It is really agriculture that is affected. But even if agricultural productivity declined by a third over the next half century, the per capita GNP we might have achieved by 2050 we would achieve only in 2051. ...

I conclude that in the United States, and probably Japan, Western Europe, and other developed countries, the impact on economic output will be negligible and unlikely to be noticed.

(Schelling 1992)

Thirty years later virtually the identical point was made by the IPCC itself in the Fifth Assessment Report:

For most economic sectors, the impact of climate change will be small relative to the impacts of other drivers. Changes in population, age, income, technology, relative prices, lifestyle, regulation, governance, and many other aspects of socioeconomic development will have an impact on the supply and demand of economic goods and services that is large relative to the impact of climate change.

(Arent *et al.* 2014, emphasis added)

That statement is validated by experience. Since 1900, the average global surface temperature anomaly warmed 1.3°C, about as much as the IPCC predicts will occur in the next century under a moderate emissions scenario. But even as the globe warmed and the population quintupled, humanity prospered as never before. For example, global average lifespan went from thirty-two years to seventy-two years, economic activity per capita grew by a factor of seven, and the death rate from extreme weather events plummeted by a factor of fifty!

While extreme weather events are costly, in all modern economies they are becoming steadily less and less important (Formetta and Feyen, 2019). Since 1990 weather-related disaster losses have declined as a proportion of global GDP (Pielke Jr, 2018, 2020) as have mortality risks (Formetta and Feyen, 2019). While economic weather-related insurance payouts are rising, this is fully explained by the growth in the size of the economy and the value of the insured asset stock. Past increases in episodes extreme weather have not had a significant effect (positive or negative) on the market value of insurance firms (Hu and McKittrick, 2015). Nor have past extreme weather events had a significant effect on U.S. banks' performance (Blickle *et al.*, 2021). Figure 11.1 below is illustrative. For these reasons, economists have long been reluctant to endorse attempts to "stop" climate change or even aggressively reduce GHG emissions because the costs would not be worth it. As one critic of the economics of climate policy put it:

Mainstream climate economics takes global warming seriously, but perplexingly concludes that the optimal economic policy is to almost do nothing about it... The contrast is striking. While climate science is sending out loud-and-clear messages that fossil-fuel disinvestment must start now, letting

go of coal and oil and diverting resources into renewable energy technology systems, to keep warming below the 2°C limit (IPCC 2014), mainstream climate economics claims that overly ambitious climate targets will unnecessarily hurt the economy and immediate de-carbonization is too expensive. Most climate economists thus recommend humanity to just wait-and-see.

(Storm 2017)

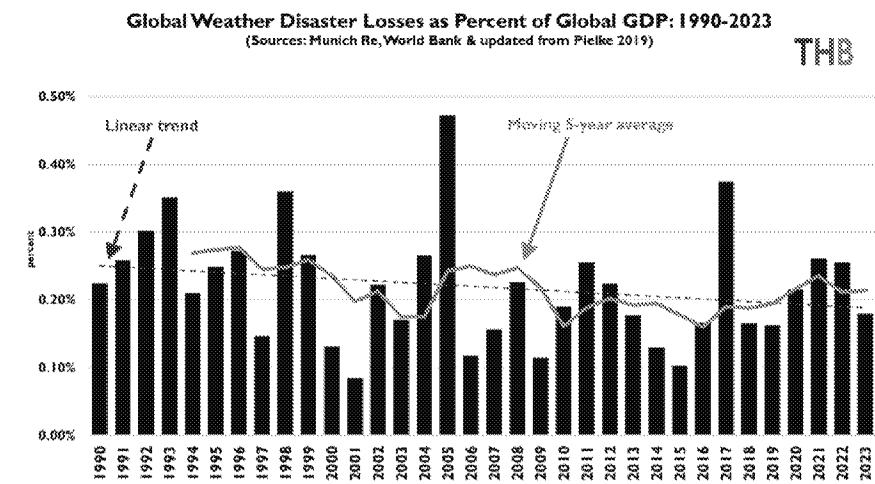


Figure 11.1 Global weather losses as a fraction of GDP. Source: Pielke Jr. (2023)

The mainstream economics position on the climate policy question is best represented by the findings over the past three decades from Integrated Assessment Models (IAMs) of climate change policy, for which Yale economist William Nordhaus was awarded the 2018 Nobel Memorial Prize in economics. IAMs combine economic, climate, and social data into a unified framework for simulating climate damages and evaluating the optimal policy response (Resources for the Future, 2025). Nordhaus' work has generally supported modest global climate policy, with aggressive measures largely deferred to later in the century. Nordhaus developed the so-called Dynamic Integrated Model of the Climate and Economy model, or DICE, in the early 1990s (Nordhaus, 1993) to study the interaction between climate change, climate policy, and global economic growth over long times. DICE assumes global emission control can be coordinated at no cost and asks what the optimal policy target should be. The climate component of the DICE model is based on simplified climatological modeling. The version of DICE at the time of Nordhaus' Nobel Prize award was described in Nordhaus (2018); it had a climate sensitivity parameter of 3.1°C for CO₂ doubling, consistent with the best estimate in contemporary IPCC reports (3.0°C).

The baseline (no policy) scenario incurs only \$0.4T in global abatement costs and leads to \$134.2T (trillion dollars) in global climate damages for a total cost of \$134.6T. The climate model component of DICE projects 4.1°C warming by 2100 relative to preindustrial temperatures. Note that this is a higher estimate of warming than many IPCC climate models.

The Optimal Policy scenario barely deviates from the business-as-usual path. It aims for +3.5°C warming, in other words we modestly scale back fossil fuel use and otherwise just live with almost all the warming. This suggests that most CO₂ emissions are less harmful than the policies that would be necessary to abate them. Trying to prevent warming causes costs quickly to outstrip the benefits. Pursuing a goal of

capping warming at 2.5°C creates total costs of \$177.8T, which is \$43.2T worse than doing nothing at all. Nordhaus didn't evaluate trying to reach a Paris-type target of 1.5°C warming but it would be even worse.

A subsequent edition of DICE includes higher assumed damages from warming which, not surprisingly leads to more aggressive policy recommendations, as explained in the section below on the Social Cost of Carbon.

11.1.2 Empirical analysis of climate change and economic growth

Many other studies have used econometric methods applied to historical data, instead of IAMs, to study the potential impact of climate change on economic growth. Dell *et al.* (2012, herein DJO12) was an influential study that used a multi-country panel of national-level data spanning 1950 to 2005, in which they matched climate and economic data by averaging temperature from the local grid cell level up to the national level using population weights. They found that warming yields an insignificant positive effect on income growth in rich countries but a significant negative effect in poor countries. Moore and Diaz (2015) modified the DICE model to take that finding into account and concluded that it implied a dramatically higher Social Cost of Carbon due to the compounding effects of income loss over time.

A large subsequent literature has debated the robustness of the DJO12 findings. Burke *et al.* (2015) analyzed a global panel with temperatures averaged up to the national level and found a negative effect on growth from warming in rich and poor countries alike when the national average temperature is above 13°C. Zhao *et al.* (2018) used the G-Econ data set of Nordhaus (2006), which breaks economic activity down to the grid cell level, replicated DJO12-type results on the same subset of countries as used in DJO12 but then showed that on the full global sample warming increases growth in rich countries and poor countries alike, though the positive effect in the latter group is confined to where local temperatures are below about 16°C. Greßer *et al.* (2021) developed a regional economic data set for 1,542 sub-national regions around the world between 2005 and 2015 and found temperature had no effect on growth. Yang *et al.* (2023) updated the DJO12 data set and applied an estimator robust to mixed sample frequencies, finding that while temperature shocks exerted a temporary effect on income levels, they did not have a significant lasting effect on growth rates.

Newell *et al.* (2021) noted that there is no underlying theory to guide econometric model specification in this literature. Taking into account the arbitrary choices of which explanatory variables to include they identified over 800 possible model specifications. Using the Burke *et al.* (2015) data they used an estimation method that accounts for model uncertainty and found that the model form preferred by Burke *et al.* (2015), which implied negative effects of warming on growth even in rich countries, is explicitly excluded by the optimal model selection algorithm. Overall they could not detect a temperature effect on GDP or GDP growth, and they estimated the 95 percent confidence interval for the impact on global growth as of 2100 even under the exaggerated RCP8.5 warming scenario spans –86 percent to +388 percent. In other words the net effect is likely positive but too uncertain to distinguish from zero.

Barker (2023) criticized the DJO12 assumption that countries can be grouped into fixed “poor” and “rich” categories based on their incomes many decades ago. He noted that many countries were once poor but became rich over time, and if this is considered the original temperature effects reported by Dell *et al.* became small and insignificant.

Berg *et al.* (2023) argued that countries shouldn't be grouped into large Rich/Poor categories because they are too heterogeneous. They instead estimated country-specific temperature response coefficients then grouped countries with similar response coefficients into small panels. They separately estimated responses

to global and idiosyncratic local temperature shocks to better identify the climate signal in weather data. Overall, they found countries experiencing negative effects of warming on growth outnumbered those experiencing positive effects, but only temporarily: eventually the effects reverse such that about twice as many countries experience a net positive growth effect. They also found global (as opposed to local) temperature changes are much more likely to benefit growth in poor countries than rich ones. In a simulation to 2100, even using the extreme RCP8.5 scenario they computed the average global GDP loss would be only 1.9 percent compared to a scenario with no warming. That is, instead of the economy growing 400 percent it would grow 392%. The implication of Nordhaus' earlier analysis is that trying to prevent the warming would lead to far less than 392 percent growth.

To summarize, economists have long considered climate a relatively unimportant factor in economic growth, a view echoed by the IPCC itself in the Fifth Assessment Report. Mainstream climate economics has recognized that CO₂-induced warming may have some negative economic effects but they are too small to justify aggressive abatement policy, and trying to “stop” or cap global warming even at levels well above the Paris target would be worse than doing nothing. An influential study in 2012 suggested that global warming would harm growth in poor countries but the finding has subsequently been found not to be robust. Studies that take full account of modeling uncertainties either find no evidence of a negative effect on global growth from CO₂ emissions or find poor countries as likely to benefit from it as rich countries.

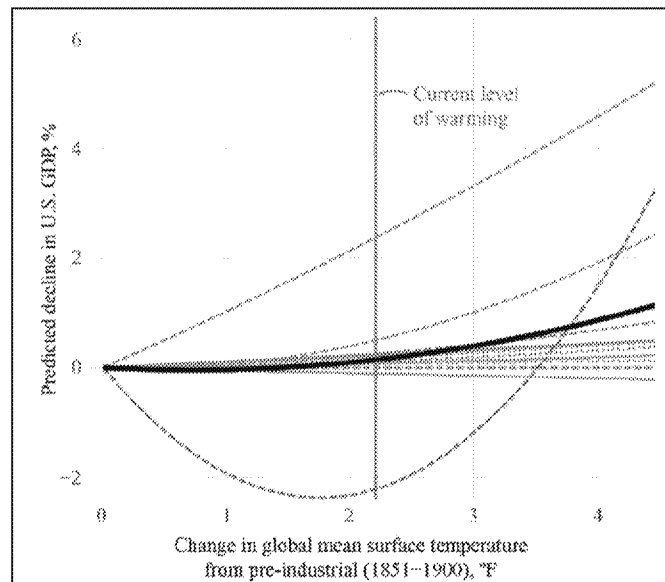


Figure 11.2: Decline in U.S. GDP per degree of warming. Source: CEA-OMB (2023)

The expectation that significant global warming would have a small impact on the U.S. economy was acknowledged quietly by the Biden Administration, even as the President was proclaiming a climate emergency. Figure 11.2, from a 2023 CEA-OMB report, shows the expected decrement in U.S. GDP as a function of temperature rise. The colored lines show the results of a dozen peer-reviewed published studies while the solid black line is their average. The figure could be summarized as “a few percent impact for a few degrees of warming”. Given that the economy’s annual growth rate is expected to be 1-2 percent, the impact of a warming globe is indeed negligible.

11.2 Models of the Social Cost of Carbon

The Social Cost of Carbon (SCC) is a tool for quantifying the economic impact of carbon dioxide emissions, helping policymakers weigh the costs and benefits of climate policies. It estimates the damage caused by emitting one additional ton of CO₂, expressed in dollars. More formally, the SCC is the discounted present value of the current and future marginal loss of economic welfare due to an additional ton of CO₂ entering the atmosphere.

11.2.1 Estimating the SCC

Although the literature refers to “estimates” of the SCC, it is not estimated in the way other economic statistics are estimated. For instance, data on market transactions including prices and quantities can be used to estimate the current inflation rate or the growth rate of per capita real Gross Domestic Product, and there are well-understood uncertainties associated with these quantities. But there are no market data available to measure many if not most of the marginal damages or benefits believed to be associated with CO₂ emissions, so these need to be imputed using economic models.

For example, an influential component of some SCC calculations is the perceived social cost associated with changed risk of future mortality due to extreme weather. There is no market in which people can directly attach a price to that risk. At best economists can try to infer such values by looking at transactions in related markets such as real estate or insurance, but isolating the component of price changes attributable to atmospheric CO₂ levels is very difficult.

Economists use IAMs to compute the SCC. Two of the best known are the Climate Framework for Uncertainty, Negotiation and Distribution (“FUND”, Tol 1997) and Nordaus’ DICE. IAMs embed a “damage function” or set of functions relating ambient temperature to local economic conditions. The assumptions embedded in the damage function will largely determine the resulting SCC. IAMs also assume a long-term discount rate or, as in DICE, compute the optimal internal discount rate as part of the solution.

One approach to developing a damage function is to begin with estimates of the costs (or benefits) of warming in specific sectors in countries around the world and aggregate up to a global amount. This was the approach used in FUND. An alternative approach is to develop a simple equation that penalizes global income according to a simple quadratic function of the average global temperature. This approach was used in DICE. In the case of the FUND model many hundreds of parameters had to be selected, whereas in DICE only three were needed and were originally chosen to assign a predetermined penalty (1.2%) to global output as of 3°C warming, with a quadratic term implying that damages grow with the square of the global average temperature anomaly. Barrage and Nordhaus (2024) recently changed the parameters to increase the penalty at 3°C to 1.6%, and added a discrete additional 1.0 percent GDP penalty at 3°C warming to account for “tipping points” (discrete large-scale environmental changes triggered by crossing a warming threshold) and a “judgmental adjustment” of 0.5 percent for excluded impacts at 3°C warming. Not surprisingly the newer version of DICE generates much higher SCC estimates than before.

The concepts of estimation and uncertainty do not readily apply to SCC calculations. By comparison, the question of whether precipitation has trended up or down along the South Carolina coast for the past hundred years can be addressed by collecting rainfall data, estimating a trend parameter and calculating statistical confidence intervals using methods with well-understood mathematical properties. In this way uncertainty can, in principle, be resolved by collecting more data and applying more accurate methods. But no amount of data collection can change the fact that many components of the SCC are unknown and rely on judgment and opinion based on knowledge of the underlying literature on the physical effects of climate change.

SCC calculations are thus best thought of as “if-then” statements: *if* the following assumptions hold, *then* the SCC is \$X per tonne. The list of ‘if’ statements includes the premise that the world’s climate and economy work according to the representation in the IAM. One way this may fail to hold is in the timing of warming. Every IAM assumes a value of the Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity (ECS), which controls the amount of warming that results from CO₂ emissions and can be freely varied for the purpose of generating

a distribution of SCC values associated with uncertainties over ECS. But as Roe and Baumann (2013) pointed out, time-to-equilibrium increases with the square of ECS, so an upward adjustment of the ECS parameter without an appropriate slowing down of the adjustment process can yield distorted present value damage estimates. In particular, the upper tail of warming associated with some commonly-used ECS distributions is physically impossible for even a thousand years into the future (Roe and Baumann 2013) yet in an IAM would be realized within a couple of centuries. Failure to align ECS with time-to-equilibrium will lead to an overestimate of the SCC value.

11.2.2 Variations in the SCC

Every level of the IAM calculation includes assumptions, some more influential than others. Key assumptions include the following.

- The discount rate: Climate damages accrue over a long time horizon and costs a century or two in the future need to be discounted to the present. The higher the discount rate the smaller the present value of future damages and vice versa. The discount rate represents the opportunity cost of spending money today rather than investing it and then having more to spend tomorrow. Some economists have argued for the use of very low discount rates in SCC calculations, resulting in policy recommendations that favor relatively large immediate investments in CO₂ emission reductions. The downside is that other investments could potentially earn a larger rate of return for society.
- Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity: IAMs have customarily employed a value of 3.0°C or 3.1°C following the IPCC's guidance. Empirically-estimated ECS values tend to be lower than this (see Chapter 9). Dayaratna *et al.* (2017, 2020, 2023) have shown that use of lower empirically-derived ECS values dramatically lower the resulting SCC estimate, even when low discount rates are used.
- Damage function coefficients: IAMs assume CO₂ and warming cause net harms that increase exponentially with temperature. More recently, IAMs have also incorporated effects from assumed potential climate tipping points. The FUND model took limited but explicit account of CO₂ fertilization effects in agriculture. Since the coefficients were selected prior the publication of the current evidence of global greening and the magnitude of benefits to crops from elevated CO₂ (see Chapters 2 and 10) the growth effects are likely understated. The DICE model (and others) did not explicitly include any CO₂ fertilization benefit, except to the extent it was taken into account in the literature consulted when picking the damage function coefficients. The damage function in FUND contains a region in which low warming yields net benefits in many regions, a finding which is supported by econometric models of warming and growth (Berg *et al.* 2023) and econometric simulations of agricultural changes (McKittrick 2025). The DICE damage function, by construction, rules out net benefits at any warming level.
- Emission scenarios: IAMs generate SCC estimates that increase as the pre-existing concentration of CO₂ increases. Consequently the value of damages later in the century will be higher, depending on the assumed baseline emissions over the coming decades.
- Abatement costs: IAMs represent the cost to the economy of reducing CO₂ emissions. If CO₂ emission reductions are assumed to be inexpensive, then the model will conclude that the optimal policy should aim for deeper emission cuts and vice versa.

It is informative to ascertain whether SCC results are invariant to changes in some assumptions. But when different assumptions result in higher or lower SCC values, the change in the SCC value does not provide *prima facie* evidence about the validity of the assumptions. For example, in 2023 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency raised its preferred SCC value about 5-fold over the estimates it had issued ten years earlier. This is not because new data had been collected or better mathematical methods

had been invented, but because new assumptions had been used, and the validity of those assumptions was a separate question. One was that global agricultural damages were far higher than previously assumed, based on an analysis in Moore *et al.* (2017). But as discussed in Chapter 10, McKittrick (2025) showed that Moore *et al.* (2017) had used a database in which half the CO₂ change observations were missing. When as many of those observations as possible were recovered from underlying sources and the analysis was rerun, the projected crop yield losses disappeared and turned into gains at all warming levels. Hence the portion of the EPA’s SCC revision attributable to agricultural yield losses was unwarranted.

11.2.3 Evidence for low SCC

Chapter 2 reviewed evidence on climate change and greening, and Chapter 9 looked at climate change and U.S. agriculture. Evidence shows that CO₂ fertilization has a stronger beneficial effect on agriculture than was known at the time that IAMs like DICE and FUND were parameterized. In particular Haverd *et al.* (2020) found the observed CO₂ fertilization rate has been almost double what had been predicted by crop models. Dayaratna *et al.* (2023) used the updated empirical ECS distribution estimate of Lewis (2022), which assimilates modern instrumental and paleoclimatic temperature records, and allowed for a 30 percent gain in the CO₂ fertilization benefit in the FUND model, and found that, even at a low discount rate of 2.5 percent, the median SCC as of 2050 is only \$18.67, with a 24 percent probability of the true value being negative. At a five percent discount rate the median SCC value is negative until the mid-2040s and at 2050 was only \$0.37 with a 49 percent probability of being negative. Thus, under reasonable assumptions a mainstream IAM using updated scientific inputs yields evidence consistent with the SCC not being significantly greater than zero.

It should also be noted that the SCC is focused on the social costs of CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel use. It does not measure the private marginal benefits to consumers and society from the availability of fossil fuels. Public willingness to pay for fuels of all types indicates the value to society of reliable, abundant fossil energy. Tol (2017) estimates that the private benefit of carbon is large relative to the social cost. This can be illustrated by noting that the price of a gallon of gas indicates the marginal value to the consumer of the fuel. Suppose we assume a relatively high Social Cost of Carbon of, say, \$75 per tonne. Deflated by a MCPF³ value of 1.5 that would result in a carbon tax of \$50 per tonne, which equates to about 44 cents per gallon of gas (Lavelle, 2019). A pre-tax price of \$3.00 per gallon would imply the marginal social benefit of the fuel is nearly seven times the marginal social cost.

11.2.4 Tipping points

SCC calculations typically consider gradual impacts of a warming climate, such as slowly-melting glaciers and increasing average temperature. A driver of potentially high values of the Social Cost of Carbon (SCC) is the introduction into models of discrete catastrophic outcomes associated with abrupt changes (Dietz *et al.*, 2021). They are often referred to as “tipping points.”

The term “tipping point” mingles two different physical concepts that pose different research challenges. Many physical systems are inherently stable unless acted upon with sufficient external energy. For example an ice cap might remain intact over a wide range of temperatures but once the temperature crosses the 0°C threshold it melts. Such discontinuities are ubiquitous in nature and require an external force. Whether the force needs to be large relative to the size of the system depends on the underlying stability of the system.

³ Marginal Cost of Public Funds: the optimal carbon tax rate is the SCC divided by the MCPF (Sandmo 1977).

A different type of tipping point is called a *bifurcation* and arises from the study of the internal dynamics of nonlinear systems (Crawford, 1991). Many systems have been observed to have more than one equilibrium point and can move between them with minimal or no external influence. For example, a weather system might have two different equilibrium states: one calm and one with a tornado. A transition from one to another can happen either with no external force or with a minuscule change, such as a flap of the proverbial butterfly's wings (Shen *et al.* 2014). The term “tipping point” is sometimes used to mean a bifurcation of this type and implies instability inherent in the system itself, which is not necessarily dependent on outside forces. It depends, instead, on parameters of the system taking values that support the emergence of bifurcations (Crawford, 1991).

The two different concepts imply different research questions. Regarding the first we are interested in whether components of the climate system are susceptible to abrupt discontinuities in response to sufficiently-large anthropogenic forcing. Regarding the second we are interested in whether the Earth's climate system has inherent bifurcations that imply the possibility of abrupt transitions with or without external forcing.

Models have been developed that imply the latter is a possibility. Kypke *et al.* (2020) presented a simple climate model in which the GHG concentration is one of the parameters that controls the emergence of bifurcations of the Arctic climate to one with both cold and warm equilibria. If sufficiently high GHG forcing combined with a sufficiently high rate of ocean heat transport are imposed a bifurcation becomes possible. More generally GCMs have been observed to contain bifurcations and multiple equilibria (Brunetti and Ragon, 2023).

The possible existence of bifurcations in the Earth's climate system implies abrupt transitions are possible, not just in response to large forcing but also to small perturbations. This places tipping points into the category of low-likelihood and potentially catastrophic events, such as large meteor strikes. A key question to ask is whether those kinds of tipping points can be predicted. Current research has not resolved that question (Dakos *et al.*, 2024) and indeed may not be able to since one implication of the “butterfly effect” is the existence of predictability boundaries of nonlinear systems (Palmer *et al.*, 2014). It is therefore not obvious how to incorporate such possibilities into SCC calculations. Small variations in assumptions will lead to arbitrarily large variations in the resulting SCC with no grounds for choosing among them. If such tipping points are possible the most appropriate stance for economic policy is to maximize resilience to any form of external catastrophe since it is unlikely we could predict it or prevent it from happening.

The IPCC AR6 (Chapter 1) focuses mainly on the first type of tipping point, namely an abrupt change in response to external forcing. This is also the meaning associated with popular usage of the “tipping point” concept in discussions of climate change (see [[HYPERLINK "https://report-2023.global-tipping-points.org/what-is-a-tipping-point/"](https://report-2023.global-tipping-points.org/what-is-a-tipping-point/)] for example). As summarized by the IPCC AR6, there is evidence of abrupt change in the paleoclimate record, and some of these events have been interpreted as tipping points. Some projections with Earth System Models for example have produced tipping points such as Amazon forest dieback in response to specified values of CO₂ concentration or temperature increases.

The alarm surrounding climate tipping points is reflected by *The Global Tipping Points Report* that was launched at the COP28 on 6 December 2023 (Lenton *et al.*, 2023). It identifies more than 25 parts of the climate system said to constitute tipping points. What gets classified as a climate “tipping point” is a moving target. The most common examples in the literature and assessment reports include: Greenland ice sheet disintegration, West Antarctic ice sheet disintegration, summertime disappearance of Arctic sea ice, Amazon rainforest dieback, coral reef dieoff, thawing of permafrost and methane hydrates, Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation collapse, boreal forest shift, West African monsoon shift, and Indian Monsoon shift.

All such tipping points require a certain amount of system instability in order to exhibit an abrupt transition in response to warming. For this reason there seems to be very little to discriminate between a tipping event and natural climate variability. Natural climate variability has in the past produced shifts in

the West African and Indian monsoons, Amazon forest and coral reef dieback, and disintegration of the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets. These impacts can be reversed on the decadal timescales associated with natural climate variability and ecosystem responses.

Some abrupt changes are potentially more consequential, including collapse of the West Antarctic ice sheet and collapse of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC). The IPCC AR6 WG1 Summary for Policy Makers states:

The Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation is very likely to weaken over the 21st century for all emission scenarios. While there is high confidence in the 21st century decline, there is only low confidence in the magnitude of the trend. There is medium confidence that there will not be an abrupt collapse before 2100. (C.3.4)

There is limited evidence for low-likelihood, high-impact outcomes (resulting from ice-sheet instability processes characterized by deep uncertainty and in some cases involving tipping points) that would strongly increase ice loss from the Antarctic Ice Sheet for centuries under high GHG emissions scenarios (e.g., SSP5-8.5). (B.5.2)

For the purpose of SCC calculations the research question implied by this type of tipping point is whether such events have been observed in the past in climate conditions similar to what we currently experience or will in the near future. The IPCC AR6 finds little evidence for impending collapse of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation or the West Antarctic ice sheet. It finds there is no tipping point associated with Arctic Sea ice (AR6 Technical Summary p. 76)

Dietz *et al.* incorporated several potential tipping points (abrupt changes) into an SCC model and found they added about 25 percent to the estimate, mainly associated with thawing permafrost and release of methane hydrates. However the IPCC considers this scenario *very unlikely* (AR6 Technical Summary p. 107).

In summary, there may be unknown bifurcation tipping points that are associated with natural climate processes, but this possibility does not translate into specific guidance on the SCC. There are potential abrupt change points in the climate system in response to warming, although the IPCC assigns low probabilities to most, including the largest ones. When these have been taken into account the result is only a modest increase in the SCC value in the 21st century.

11.2.5 Are there alternatives?

It is increasingly being argued that the SCC is too variable to be useful for policymakers. Cambridge Econometrics (Thoung, 2017) stated it's "time to kill it" due to uncertainties. The UK and EU no longer use SCC for policy appraisal, opting for "target-consistent" carbon pricing (UK Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2022, Dunne 2017). However, the uncertainty of SCC estimates doesn't mean that other regulatory measures are inherently better or more efficient. Many emissions regulations (such as electric vehicle mandates, renewable energy mandates, energy efficiency regulations and bans on certain types of home appliances) cost far more per tonne of abatement than any mainstream SCC estimate, which is sufficient to establish that they fail a cost-benefit test.

References

AR6: *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report* (2021) Working Group I Contribution. [[HYPERLINK "http://www.ipcc.ch"](http://www.ipcc.ch)].

- Arent, D.J., R.S.J. Tol, E. Faust, J.P. Hella, S. Kumar, K.M. Strzepek, F.L. Tóth, and D. Yan (2014) Key economic sectors and services. In: Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Field, C.B., V.R. Barros, D.J. Dokken, K.J. Mach, M.D. Mastrandrea, T.E. Bilir, M. Chatterjee, K.L. Ebi, Y.O. Estrada, R.C. Genova, B. Girma, E.S. Kissel, A.N. Levy, S. MacCracken, P.R. Mastrandrea, and L.L. White (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA, pp. 659-708. [HYPERLINK "https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/WGIIAR5-Chap10_FINAL.pdf"]
- Barker, D. (2023) Temperature Shocks and Economic Growth: Comment on Dell, Jones, and Olken. *Econ Journal Watch* 20(2) 234-253 [HYPERLINK "<https://econjwatch.org/articles/temperature-shocks-and-economic-growth-comment-on-dell-jones-and-olken>"]
- Barrage, Lint and William Nordhaus (2024) Policies, projections, and the social cost of carbon: Results from the DICE-2023 model. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 121 (13) e2312030121 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2312030121>"]
- Berg, Kimberly, Chadwick C Curtis and Nelson Mark. (2021) GDP and temperature: Evidence on cross-country response heterogeneity. NBER Working Paper 31327 June 2023 [HYPERLINK "<http://www.nber.org/papers/w31327>"]
- Blickle, Kristian; Sarah N. Hamerling, and Donald P. Morgan (2021) : How bad are weather disasters for banks?, Staff Reports, No. 990, Federal Reserve Bank of New York, New York, NY [HYPERLINK "<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/247913/1/sr990.pdf>"]
- Brunetti, Maura and Charline Ragon (2023) Attractors and bifurcation diagrams in complex climate models. *Physical Review E* 107 054214 [HYPERLINK "<https://journals.aps.org/pre/abstract/10.1103/PhysRevE.107.054214>"]
- Burke, Marshall, Solomon M Hsiang, and Edward Miguel (2015). Global non-linear effect of temperature on economic production. *Nature*, 527(7577):235–239.
- Council of Economic Advisors-Office of Management and Budget (CEA-OMB 2023) Methodologies and considerations for integrating the physical and transition risks of climate change into macroeconomic forecasting for the president's budget. March 13, 2023. [HYPERLINK "<https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CEA-OMB-White-Paper.pdf>"]
- Crawford, John D (1991) Introduction to Bifurcation Theory. *Reviews of Modern Physics* 63(4) October 1991 991—1037.
- Dakos, Vasilis, Chris Boulton, Joshua Buxton *et al.* (2024) Tipping point detection and early warnings in climate, ecological, and human systems. *Earth System Dynamics* 15 1117—1135 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.5194/esd-15-1117-2024>"]
- Dayaratna, Kevin and Ross McKittrick (2023) "Reply to comment on "climate sensitivity, agricultural productivity and the social cost of carbon in fund" by Philip Meyer" *Environmental Economics and Policy Studies* 2023 link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10018-023-00364-2
- Dayaratna, Kevin, Ross McKittrick and David Kreutzer (2017) Empirically-Constrained Climate Sensitivity and the Social Cost of Carbon. *Climate Change Economics* April 2017 DOI: [HYPERLINK "<http://dx.doi.org/10.1142/S2010007817500063>"]
- Dayaratna, Kevin, Ross McKittrick and Patrick J. Michaels (2020) Climate Sensitivity, Agricultural Productivity and the Social Cost of Carbon in FUND. *Environmental Economics and Policy Studies* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10018-020-00263-w>
- Dell, Melissa, Benjamin F. Jones, and Benjamin A. Olken (2012). Temperature shocks and economic growth: Evidence from the last half century. *American economic journal: Macroeconomics*, 4(3):66–95, 2012. ISSN 1945-7707.
- Dietz, S., J. Rising, T. Stoerk, G. Wagner (2021) Economic impact of tipping points in the climate system. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 2021 Vol. 118 No. 34 e2103081118
- Dunne, Daisy (2017), "Q&A: The Social Cost of Carbon," Carbon Brief, February 14, 2017, [HYPERLINK "<https://www.carbonbrief.org/qa-social-cost-carbon/>"]

- Formetta, Giuseppe and Luc Feyen (2019) Empirical evidence of declining global vulnerability to climate-related hazards. *Global Environmental Change* 57 101920 [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.05.004"](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.05.004)]
- Greßer, Christina, Daniel Meierrieks, and David Stadelmann (2021) The link between regional temperature and regional incomes: econometric evidence with sub-national data. *Economic Policy*, 36(107):523–550, 2021.
- Haverd, V., Raupach, M., Briggs, P., *et al.* (2020). Higher than expected CO₂ fertilization inferred from leaf to global observations. *Global Change Biology*, 26, 2390–2402.
- Hu, Bin and Ross McKittrick (2015) Climatic Variations and the Market Value of Insurance Firms. *Journal of Insurance Issues* Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 92-111 [[HYPERLINK "https://www.jstor.org/stable/43741103"](https://www.jstor.org/stable/43741103)]
- Kypke, K. L., Langford, W. F., and Willms, A. R.: Anthropocene climate bifurcation, *Nonlin. Processes Geophys.*, 27, 391–409, <https://doi.org/10.5194/npg-27-391-2020>, 2020.
- Lavelle, Marianne (2019) Carbon Tax Plans: How They Compare and Why Oil Giants Support One of Them. *Inside Climate News* March 7, 2019 [[HYPERLINK "https://insideclimatenews.org/news/07032019/carbon-tax-proposals-compare-baker-shultz-exxon-conocophillips-ccl-congress/"](https://insideclimatenews.org/news/07032019/carbon-tax-proposals-compare-baker-shultz-exxon-conocophillips-ccl-congress/)]
- Lenton, T.M., D.I. Armstrong McKay, *et al.* (eds) (2023) *The Global Tipping Points Report 2023*. University of Exeter, Exeter, UK. [[HYPERLINK "https://report-2023.global-tipping-points.org/"](https://report-2023.global-tipping-points.org/)]
- Lewis, N., (2013) An objective Bayesian, improved approach for applying optimal fingerprint techniques to estimate climate sensitivity. *Journal of Climate*, 26, 7414-7429. [[HYPERLINK "https://journals.ametsoc.org/doi/abs/10.1175/JCLI-D-12-00473.1"](https://journals.ametsoc.org/doi/abs/10.1175/JCLI-D-12-00473.1)]
- McKittrick, Ross R. (2025) Extended Crop Yield Meta-analysis Data do not Support Upward SCC Revision. *Scientific Reports* 15 article 5575 [[HYPERLINK "https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-025-90254-2"](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-025-90254-2)]
- Moore, Frances C. and Delavane B. Diaz (2015) Temperature impacts on economic growth warrant stringent mitigation policy. *Nature Climate Change*, 5(2):127–131, 2015. ISSN 1758-678X.
- Moore FC, Baldos U, Hertel T, Diaz D (2017) New science of climate change impacts on agriculture implies higher social cost of carbon. *Nature Communications* 8:1607. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-017-01792-x"](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-017-01792-x)]
- Newell, Richard G., Brian C. Prest, and Steven E. Sexton (2021). The GDP-temperature relationship: Implications for climate change damages. *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, 108 [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeem.2021.102445"](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeem.2021.102445)]
- Nordhaus, William (2006). Geography and macroeconomics: New data and new findings. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 103(10):3510–3517, 2006. ISSN 0027-8424.
- Nordhaus, William. (2018) Projections and Uncertainties About Climate Change in an Era of Minimal Climate Policies. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* August 2018, 10(3): 333-360. [[HYPERLINK "https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/pol.20170046"](https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/pol.20170046)]
- Nordhaus, W. (1993) Optimal Greenhouse-Gas Reductions and Tax Policy in the "DICE" Model *American Economic Review* Vol. 83, No. 2, (Papers and Proceedings) pp.313-317.
- Palmer, TN, A Döring and G Seregin (2014) The real butterfly effect. *Nonlinearity* 27(9) 10.1088/0951-7715/27/9/R123 [[HYPERLINK "https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/0951-7715/27/9/R123/meta"](https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/0951-7715/27/9/R123/meta)]
- Pielke Jr., Roger (2018): Tracking progress on the economic costs of disasters under the indicators of the sustainable development goals, *Environmental Hazards*, DOI: 10.1080/17477891.2018.1540343
- Pielke Jr., Roger (2020) Economic ‘normalisation’ of disaster losses 1998–2020: a literature review and assessment,” *Environmental Hazards*, 2020, pp. 1-19
- Pielke Jr., Roger (2023) Global disaster losses: 1990-2023 Substack essay [[HYPERLINK "https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/global-disaster-losses1990-2023"](https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/global-disaster-losses1990-2023)]

- Resources for the Future (2025) “Social Cost of Carbon Explorer,” Resources for the Future website, accessed April 22, 2025, [HYPERLINK "<https://www.rff.org/publications/data-tools/scc-explorer/>"].
- Roe, Gerard H. and Yoram Bauman (2013) Climate Sensitivity: Should the climate tail wag the policy dog? *Climatic Change* (2013) 117:647–662 DOI 10.1007/s10584-012-0582-6
- Sandmo, Agnar (1975) “Optimal Taxation in the Presence of Externalities.” *Swedish Journal of Economics* 77 (1), 86–98.
- Schelling, Thomas C (1992) Some economics of global warming. *The American Economic Review*, 82 (1):1–14.
- Shen, Bo-Wen, Roger A Pielke Sr and Xubin Zeng (2023) The 50th Anniversary of the Metaphorical Butterfly Effect since Lorenz (1972): Multistability, Multiscale Predictability, and Sensitivity in Numerical Models. *Atmosphere* 2023 14(8) [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.3390/atmos14081279>"]
- Storm, S (2017) “How the Invisible Hand is Supposed to Adjust the Natural Thermostat: A Guide for the Perplexed.” *Science and Engineering Ethics* vol 23: 1307—1331.
- Thoung, Chris (2017) “Is It Time to Kill Off the Social Cost of Carbon?” Cambridge Econometrics Blog, September 14, 2017, [HYPERLINK "<https://www.camecon.com/blog/time-kill-social-cost-carbon/>"].
- Tol, Richard S.J. (1997) On the optimal control of carbon dioxide emissions: an application of FUND *Environmental Modeling and Assessment* 2: 151—163.
- Tol, Richard S.J. (2017). “The Private Benefit of Carbon and its Social Cost,” Working Paper Series 0717, Department of Economics, University of Sussex Business School. [HYPERLINK "<https://ideas.repec.org/p/sus/susewp/0717.html>"]
- UK Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (2022). “Carbon Valuation.” GOV.UK, last updated April 4, 2022. [HYPERLINK "<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/carbon-valuation--2>"].
- US Environmental Protection Agency (2023) Supplementary Material for the Regulatory Impact Analysis for the Final Rulemaking, “Standards of Performance for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources and Emissions Guidelines for Existing Sources: Oil and Natural Gas Sector Climate Review”, EPA Report on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases: Estimates Incorporating Recent Scientific Advances, November 2023, [HYPERLINK "https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-12/epa_scghg_2023_report_final.pdf"] accessed February 28, 2024.
- Yang, Yimin, Fei Jia, and Haoran Li. Estimation of panel data models with mixed sampling frequencies (2023). *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, 85(3):514–544.
- Zhao, Xiaobing, Mason Gerety, and Nicolai V. Kuminoff (2018) Revisiting the temperature-economic growth relationship using global subnational data. *Journal of environmental management*, 223:537–544, 2018.

12 GLOBAL CLIMATE IMPACTS OF U.S. EMISSIONS POLICIES

Chapter Summary

U.S. policy actions are expected to have undetectably small direct impacts on the global climate and any effects will emerge only with long delays.

12.1 The scale problem

The emissions rates and atmospheric concentrations of criteria air contaminants are closely connected because their lifetimes are short and their concentrations are small; when local emissions are reduced the local pollution concentration drops rapidly, usually within a few days. But the global average CO₂ concentration behaves very differently, since emissions mix globally and the global carbon cycle is vast and slow. Any change in local CO₂ emissions today will have only a very small global effect, and only with a long delay.

Following the emission of a pulse (release) of CO₂ into the atmosphere only about 40± 15 percent of the emitted CO₂ will have been sequestered after twenty years. That fraction rises to 75± 10 percent after a thousand years, and the remainder will be gradually removed over the ensuing tens of thousands of years (Ciais *et al.*, 2013, pp. 472-473). Consequently, any reduction in U.S. emissions would only modestly slow, but not prevent, the rise of global CO₂ concentration. And even if global emissions were to stop tomorrow, it would take decades or centuries to see a meaningful reduction in the global CO₂ concentration and hence human influences on the climate.

Reducing the atmospheric stock of CO₂ would require emissions to fall below the natural sequestration rate, assuming the entire increase is anthropogenic. Since that rate has been averaging about 50 percent of emissions in recent decades, a reduction of global emissions by 50 percent would (at least temporarily) halt the rise in atmospheric CO₂. The 1997 Kyoto Protocol proposed to cap industrial nations' CO₂ emissions at a modest five percent below 1990 levels by the year 2012. Even though this policy was too difficult for most nations to implement, full compliance would not have substantially reduced atmospheric CO₂ levels. It would only have slightly slowed CO₂ growth, reaching the projected year 2100 level in 2105 instead (Wigley, 1998). Lomborg (2016) estimated that full compliance with the Paris Accord would not stop warming, it would only prevent about 0.1C warming and delay hitting the baseline year 2100 temperature levels by about a decade.

Thus, in contrast with conventional air pollution control, even drastic local actions will have negligible local effects, and only with a long delay. The practice of referring to unilateral U.S. reductions as “combatting climate change” or “taking action on climate” therefore reflects a profound misunderstanding of the scale of the issue.

12.2 Case study: U.S. motor vehicle emissions

The scale problem can be illustrated with reference to U.S. motor vehicles. The EPA's 2009 Endangerment Finding focused on CO₂ emissions from cars and light-duty trucks in the U.S. because Section 202(a) of Clean Air Act mandates the EPA to set emissions standards for motor vehicles if pollutants are found to endanger public health or welfare. The 2009 Endangerment Finding therefore obligated the EPA to regulate emissions from new motor vehicles, ostensibly to reduce or eliminate climate-related harms to the U.S. public.

Two questions that naturally arise are: (1) How large a reduction in CO₂ emissions would result from such regulation? and (2) What would be the climate impact of such regulation?

The first question can be addressed by comparing U.S. vehicle-based CO₂ emissions to the global total. The second question can be addressed by using the fact that the reduction in global warming would be, according to the models relied upon by the EPA, proportional to the reduction in global emissions, keeping in mind that the change in the CO₂ content of the atmosphere in any given year is the result of total global CO₂ emissions, not just U.S. emissions.

In 2022, the emissions from U.S. cars and light duty trucks totaled 1.05 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide (GtCO₂, EPA 2024). Meanwhile global CO₂ emissions from energy use totaled 34.6 GtCO₂ (Energy Institute 2024). Hence U.S. cars and light trucks account for only 3.0 percent of global energy-related CO₂ emissions. To a first approximation we can say that even eliminating all U.S. vehicle-based emissions would retard the accumulation of CO₂ in the atmosphere by a year or two over a century.

It would also reduce the overall warming trend by at most about 3 percent. For the period 1979-2023, which has the most extensive global coverage of a variety of weather data types, warming trends are determined to a precision of about ± 15 percent, so the impact of reducing the rate of global warming by eliminating U.S. vehicle CO₂ emissions would be far below the limits of measurability. Given that global-average temperature is the most direct climate change metric, impacts on any secondary climate metrics (e.g. severe weather, floods, drought, etc.) from reducing U.S. vehicle CO₂ emissions would be even less measurable.

Consequently, in contrast to the case of local air contaminants like particulates and ozone, even the most aggressive regulatory actions on GHG emissions from U.S. vehicles cannot be expected to remediate alleged climate dangers to the U.S. public on any measurable scale.

References

- Ciais, P., C. Sabine, G. Bala, L. Bopp, V. Brovkin, *et al.* (2013): Carbon and Other Biogeochemical Cycles. In: Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Stocker, T.F., D. Qin, G.-K. Plattner, M. Tignor, *et al.* (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA
- EPA (2024) *Fast Facts: U.S. Transportation Sector Greenhouse Gas Emissions 1990-2022*. Available online at [HYPERLINK "<https://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyPDF.cgi?Dockey=P101AKR0.pdf>"]
- Energy Institute (2024) Statistical Review of World Energy. Available online at [HYPERLINK "<https://www.energyinst.org/statistical-review>"]
- Lomborg, Bjorn (2016) "Impact of Current Climate Proposals" *Global Policy* 7(1) 109—118. Available at <http://online.library.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1758-5899.12295/full>.
- Wigley, T.M.L. (1998). "The Kyoto Protocol: CO₂, CH₄ and climate implications." *Geophysical Research Letters* 25(13), 2285-2288

GLOSSARY

2XCO₂: Doubling of the atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂), a commonly used baseline for addressing climate change. In 2025, atmospheric CO₂ concentrations were approximately 50 percent of the way to 2XCO₂ compared to 1800.

ABATEMENT: In the context of environmental policy, the reduction of emissions.

ACE (Accumulated Cyclone Energy): A statistical measure of a tropical cyclone's energy accumulated over its lifetime, calculated from a summation of the square of maximum sustained wind speeds.

ACIDIFICATION: A commonly used term for the reduction in ocean pH from more alkaline to less alkaline values.

ACRIM (Active Cavity Radiometer Irradiance Monitor) GAP: the gap in total solar irradiance data between 1989 and 1991 caused by a delay in the launch of a satellite-borne monitor in time to overlap and intercalibrate with the prior system.

AEROSOLS: Tiny solid or liquid particles suspended in the air.

ALKALINE: Having a chemical pH greater than 7.0. The “opposite” of acidic, which means a pH less than 7.0.

AMBIENT: Relating to the immediate surroundings of something.

AMO: Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation, a 60-year cycle of sea surface temperatures in the North Atlantic.

ANTHROPOGENIC: Created by humans.

AR (Assessment Reports): Periodic assessments published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change evaluating current knowledge of the climate system, global change, and associated issues. An AR now consists of reports from three working groups, the first (WG1) concerned with physical science and the others concerned with societal impacts and mitigation strategies. The most recent was the AR6.

ATTRIBUTION: Assertion of a causal relation, chiefly from anthropogenic GHG emissions to observed climate patterns.

AUTOCORRELATION: The phenomenon in which the current value of a random time series variable is correlated with its value in a previous time period.

BIOMASS: The total quantity or weight of organic matter in a given area or volume.

CARBON: The 6th element in the periodic table. Popularly used as a shorthand term for carbon dioxide.

CMIP (Coupled Model Intercomparison Project): The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's organized effort to compare many different global ocean-atmosphere climate models when they are all forced with the same emissions scenario(s). The two most recent were the CMIP5 and CMIP6 for, respectively, AR5 and AR6.

CONUS: The contiguous 48 U.S. states.

DICE (Dynamic Integrated model of the Climate and Economy): An Integrated Assessment Model developed by William Nordhaus in 1993.

DISCOUNT RATE: The interest rate used to convert future costs and benefits into their present value. Varies inversely with present value so a high discount rate reduces the present value of future costs and benefits.

DRY ICE: Frozen carbon dioxide.

ECONOMETRICS: The branch of economics concerned with the use of statistical methods (chiefly multiple regression) to analyse economic systems.

ECS (Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity): The total amount of eventual global-average surface warming in response to a hypothetical doubling of the atmospheric CO₂ concentration compared to pre-Industrial levels.

EL NIÑO: The warm phase of the El Niño – Southern Oscillation, involving weaker upwelling of cold water off the South American coast and weaker Pacific trade winds.

EMISSIONS SCENARIO: An assumed scenario of future greenhouse gas emissions (or resulting atmospheric concentrations) based upon assumptions regarding global economic activity, the prevalence of fossil fuel use, and (sometimes) global carbon cycle model estimates of the rate of CO₂ uptake by land and ocean.

ENDANGERMENT FINDING (EF): The 2009 finding by the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency that emissions of well-mixed greenhouse gases (primarily CO₂) endanger human health and welfare.

ENSO: El Niño – Southern Oscillation, a prominent natural climate fluctuation involving year-to-year variations in the upwelling of cold water off the equatorial coast of South America and associated strengthening or weakening of trade winds across the Pacific Ocean.

FACE: (Free-Air CO₂ Enrichment) Large-scale open-air studies that expose plants to elevated CO₂ levels, simulating future climate scenarios.

FOSSIL FUEL: A natural hydrocarbon fuel such as coal, oil, or natural gas formed in the geological past from the remains of living organisms.

FUND (Framework for Uncertainty, Negotiation, and Distribution): An Integrated Assessment Model developed by Richard Tol in 1997.

GBR (Great Barrier Reef): The world's largest coral reef ecosystem located off the northeast coast of Australia.

GDP (Gross Domestic Product): Total market value of all the final goods and services produced within a country's border, usually over one year.

GHCN (Global Historical Climatology Network): A time-varying number of globally distributed weather stations making hourly, daily, or monthly measurements of precipitation, temperature and sometimes snowfall and snow depth.

GLOBAL GREENING: The satellite-observed increase in greenness in most vegetated land areas observed since the early 1980s.

GNP (Gross National Product): Total market value of all the final goods and services produced by the citizens of a country, including exports and imports, usually over one year.

GDP (Gross National Product): Total market value of all the domestically-produced final goods and services produced by the citizens of a country, usually over one year.

GREENHOUSE EFFECT (GHE): The tendency for any planetary atmosphere containing greenhouse gases to be warmer in the lowest layers than if those gases did not exist.

GREENHOUSE GAS (GHG): An atmospheric gas that absorbs and emits infrared radiation, especially water vapor, CO₂, and methane.

HURST PHENOMENON: See long term persistence.

HYDROLOGY: The study of the movement of water, especially on land and in the atmosphere.

IAM (Integrated Assessment Model): A computerized tool that combines economics, climate science, and social sciences to provide quantitative relationships between human and Earth systems, helping to inform policy decisions.

IEA (International Energy Agency): A Paris-based intergovernmental organization, established in 1974, that provides policy recommendations, analysis and data on the global energy sector.

IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change): A panel of international experts and governmental representatives established by the United Nations and World Meteorological Organization in 1988 to provide governments at all levels with scientific information that they can use to develop climate policies.

IR (Infrared): Heat radiation that all solid objects and greenhouse gases emit by virtue of their temperature.

LA NIÑA: The cool phase of ENSO, involving stronger upwelling of cold water off the South American coast and stronger Pacific trade winds.

LONG TERM PERSISTENCE (LTP, or HURST PHENOMENON): A form of autocorrelation in which random fluctuations induce long term but not permanent changes in the mean value of a series, which shows up in some climate data series as cyclical or trending patterns on short time scales.

MAIZE: Corn.

MODEL: A computer code or collection of codes which quantify our knowledge of various processes and the interactions between those processes.

MORTALITY: Death or number of deaths, usually expressed for a specific population and period.

NCA (National Climate Assessment): A periodic report mandated by the Global Change Research Act of 1990 summarizing the impact of climate change on the United States. There have been five NCA reports: NCA1 (2000), NCA2 (2009), NCA3 (2014), NCA4 (2017-18), and NCA5 (2023).

OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development): A group of 38 member countries that have a democratic system of government and free economic systems.

PALEOCLIMATE: Climate of the distant past, before modern weather instruments were widely used (typically pre-1850), necessitating the use of “proxy” measurements such as tree rings, ice core, pollen records, etc.

PDI (Power Dissipation Index): A statistical estimate of the accumulated destructive potential of a tropical cyclone over time, calculated as a summation of the cube of the maximum sustained wind speeds.

PDO: Pacific Decadal Oscillation, a recurring ocean-atmosphere interaction centered over the Pacific basin associated with predominantly warm or cool patterns that influence the global climate.

PHOTOSYNTHESIS: The process by which plants grow, requiring carbon dioxide, water, and light at sufficiently warm temperatures (10 to 35 deg. C for optimal function).

PPM: Parts per million, a measure of the concentration of a substance in (for example) the atmosphere

PRE-INDUSTRIAL: The near-term historical period before which human greenhouse gas emissions were considered significant, usually assumed to be the mid-1700s.

RADIATIVE FEEDBACK: A change in the balance between absorbed solar radiation and emitted infrared (IR) radiation, referenced to the top of the atmosphere, caused by changes in surface temperature.

RADIATIVE FORCING: The change in the balance between absorbed solar radiation and emitted infrared (IR) radiation, referenced to the top of the atmosphere, caused by changes in greenhouse gases, anthropogenic aerosols, volcanoes, etc.

RCP (Representative Concentration Pathway) SCENARIOS: Different scenarios for future greenhouse gas emissions and their impact on the atmosphere, introduced in the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report (AR5). RCP scenarios have a number label (e.g. RCP6.0) indicating how much radiative forcing they assume in 2100 relative to pre-Industrial times, in Watts per square meter. RCP4.5 and RCP6.0 are intermediate scenarios, whereas RCP8.5 is an extreme scenario with very large future emissions of greenhouse gases.

REGRESSION: A statistical method for selecting the coefficients of a linear equation to explain the behaviour of a dependent variable in terms of variations in one or more explanatory variables.

RICARDIAN ANALYSIS: A method used in environmental economics named after David Ricardo to estimate the economic impacts of climate change, particularly on agriculture, by making use of the hypothesis that expected changes in the return to future agricultural activity will be capitalized into current land values.

SCC (Social Cost of Carbon): An estimate of the net economic damages, measured in present-value dollars, caused by emitting one additional ton of CO₂ into the atmosphere.

SSP (Shared Socioeconomic Pathway) SCENARIOS: Different scenarios for future greenhouse gas emissions and their impact on the atmosphere, introduced in the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report (AR6). Some of the SSP scenarios are analogous to the older RCP scenarios, for purposes of continuity and comparison to earlier climate model assessments.

TC: Tropical cyclone.

TMAX: The daily maximum surface air temperature.

TMIN: The daily minimum surface air temperature.

TOA: Top of atmosphere.

TOXICOLOGY: The study of the adverse effects of chemical substances on living organisms.

TREND: A coefficient, usually estimated using linear regression, representing the slope of a line of best fit through a time series of data, indicating any tendency for the series mean to move up or down over time.

TSI (Total Solar Irradiance): The measure of the total amount of incident solar radiation per unit area, including all wavelengths of electromagnetic radiation, that reaches the Earth's atmosphere. Typically shown in units of watts per square meter (W/m²).

UHI (Urban Heat Island): The tendency for inhabited areas to be warmer than their rural surroundings, due to the replacement of natural land and vegetation with roads, parking lots, buildings, and waste heat sources.

USHCN: The U.S. Historical Climatology Network, consisting of quality-controlled temperature and precipitation data from 1,218 surface weather stations.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

John Christy, Ph.D. is the Distinguished Professor of Atmospheric and Earth Sciences and Alabama's State Climatologist at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. He has a B.A. (Mathematics) from CSU Fresno and an M.S. and Ph.D. (Atmospheric Sciences) from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. He is a Fellow of the American Meteorological Society and recipient of The NASA Medal for Exceptional Scientific Achievement for constructing, with Dr. Roy Spencer, the first global atmospheric temperature dataset from polar orbiting satellites. He served as Lead Author of the 3rd IPCC Assessment Report (2001), he has coauthored National Academy of Science expert reports on Climate Observations (1995) and Surface Temperature Reconstructions (2006), and he has served on the NOAA Climate Change Science Program, NASA's Earth Science Subcommittee, the National Research Council Space Studies Board and the EPA Science Advisory Board. In addition, Dr. Christy has given testimony in 20 Congressional Hearings.

Judith Curry, Ph.D. is Professor Emerita at the Georgia Institute of Technology, where she served as Chair of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences for 13 years. She is President and co-founder of Climate Forecast Applications Network (CFAN). Curry has a PhD in Geophysical Sciences from the University of Chicago. She has authored or coauthored 192 peer-reviewed papers in atmospheric and climate sciences, two textbooks, and most recently the book *Climate Uncertainty and Risk*. Curry is a Fellow of the American Meteorological Society, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Geophysical Union, and a Member of the American Academy of Sciences and Letters.

The Honorable Steven E. Koonin, Ph.D. is the Edward Teller Senior Fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution. He has served as Under Secretary for Science at the Department of Energy (2009-2011), as Chief Scientist for British Petroleum (2004-2009), and as a professor at Caltech (1975 – 2004, the last nine years as Vice President and Provost). Koonin is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and the JASON group of government advisors, as well as a Governor of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, having served in similar capacities for the Los Alamos, Sandia, Brookhaven, and Argonne National Laboratories. Other prior roles include a University Professor at New York University, a non-resident Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and a Trustee of the Institute for Defense Analyses. Koonin has a BS in Physics from Caltech and a PhD in Theoretical Physics from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He authored the 2021 bestseller *Unsettled: What Climate Science Tells Us, What It Doesn't, and Why It Matters*, the 1985 textbook *Computational Physics*, and some 200 peer-reviewed papers in physics and astrophysics, scientific computation, energy technology and policy, and climate science.

Ross McKittrick, Ph.D., is a Professor of Environmental Economics at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada. He holds a BA in economics from Queen's University, and an MA and Ph.D. in economics from the University of British Columbia. He has published widely in both economics and physical science journals on topics related to climate change, pollution and public policy. His book *Economic Analysis of Environmental Policy* was published by the University of Toronto Press in 2010. His background in applied statistics has led him to author or coauthor peer-reviewed publications across a wide range of topics in the physical sciences including paleoclimate reconstruction, malaria transmission, surface temperature measurement, climate attribution methodology and climate model evaluation. Professor McKittrick has made many invited academic presentations around the world, and has testified before the U.S. Congress and committees of the Canadian House of Commons and Senate.

Roy W. Spencer, Ph.D., is a Principal Research Scientist at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. He holds a BS in Atmospheric and Oceanic Science from the University of Michigan, and MS and PhD in Meteorology from the University of Wisconsin -Madison. Spencer's published research has focused on monitoring of weather processes and climate change from Earth-orbiting satellites, as well as using simple physical models for diagnosing climate sensitivity and climate feedbacks. As a NASA Senior Scientist for Climate Studies he served as the U.S. Science Team Leader for the Advanced Microwave Scanning Radiometer (AMSR-E) flying on the Aqua satellite, providing our most accurate global measurements of sea surface temperatures, sea ice, and several other features of the climate system. Along with Dr. John Christy, Spencer developed the first satellite-based technique for global temperature monitoring, for which they received NASA's Exceptional Scientific Achievement Medal and the American Meteorological Society's Special Award.

GLOSSARY

2XCO₂: doubling of the atmospheric CO₂ content relative to pre-Industrial times, a commonly used baseline for addressing climate change. In 2025, atmospheric CO₂ concentrations were approximately 50% of the way to 2XCO₂.

ABATEMENT: ~~in the context of environmental policy the~~ ~~in the context of pollution, the reduction of~~ ~~harmful impacts through pollution reduction~~ ~~reduction of emissions~~

ACE (Accumulated Cyclone Energy): a statistical measure of a tropical cyclone's energy accumulated over its lifetime, calculated from a summation of the square of maximum sustained wind speeds

ACIDIFICATION: a commonly used term for the reduction in ocean pH from more alkaline to less alkaline values

AEROSOLS: tiny solid or liquid particles suspended in the air

ALKALINE: having a chemical pH greater than 7.0. The "opposite" of acidic, which means a pH less than 7.0

AMBIENT: relating to the immediate surroundings of something

ANTHROPOGENIC: created by humans

AR (IPCC Assessment Reports): periodic assessments published by the IPCC evaluating current knowledge of the climate system, global change, and associated issues. ~~An AR now consists of reports from three working groups, the first (WG1) concerned with physical science. The most recent was the AR6 in 2023.~~

ATTRIBUTION: ~~assertion of a causal relation, chiefly from anthropogenic GHG emissions to observed climate patterns.~~

AUTOCORRELATION: ~~the phenomenon in which the current value of a random time series variable is correlated with its value in a previous time period.~~

BIOMASS: the total quantity or weight of organic matter in a given area or volume

CARBON: ~~The 6th element in the periodic table. popular and widely~~ ~~Popularly used as a shorthand term~~ ~~for carbon dioxide~~

Formatted: Superscript

CMIP (Coupled Model Intercomparison Project): The IPCC's organized effort to compare many different global ocean-atmosphere climate models when they are all forced with the same emissions scenario(s). ~~The two most recent were the CMIP5 and CMIP6 for, respectively, AR5 and AR6.~~

CONUS: the contiguous 48 U.S. states

DICE (Dynamic Integrated model of the Climate and Economy): An Integrated Assessment Model (IAM) developed by William Nordhaus in 1993.

DISCOUNT RATE: ~~here, the~~ The interest rate used to convert future costs and benefits of environmental regulations into their present value. Varies inversely with present value so A: high discount rate reduces the present value of future costs and benefits environmental benefits from regulating sooner, a low discount rate favors long-term benefits of regulating sooner.

DRY ICE: frozen carbon dioxide

ECONOMETRICS: ~~the branch of economics concerned with the use of math and statistics~~ statistical methods (chiefly multiple regression) in describing to analyse economic systems

ECS (Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity): The total amount of eventual global-average surface warming in response to a hypothetical doubling of the atmospheric CO₂ concentration compared to pre-Industrial levels.

EL NIÑO: the warm phase of ENSO, involving weaker upwelling of cold water off the South American coast and weaker Pacific trade winds.

EMISSIONS SCENARIO: An assumed scenario of future greenhouse gas emissions (or resulting atmospheric concentrations) based upon assumptions regarding global economic activity, the prevalence of fossil fuel use, and (sometimes) global carbon cycle model estimates of the rate of CO₂ uptake by land and ocean.

ENDANGERMENT FINDING (EF): the 2009 finding by the Administrator of the EPA that CO₂ emissions endanger human health and welfare

ENSO: El Niño – Southern Oscillation, a prominent natural climate fluctuation involving year-to-year variations in the upwelling of cold water off the equatorial coast of South America and associated strengthening or weakening of trade winds across the Pacific Ocean

FACE: (Free-Air CO₂ Enrichment) large-scale open-air studies that expose plants to elevated CO₂ levels, simulating future climate scenarios.

FOSSIL FUEL: a natural hydrocarbon fuel such as coal or natural gas formed in the geological past from the remains of living organisms

FUND: An Integrated Assessment Model (IAM) developed by Richard Tol in 1997.

GBR (Great Barrier Reef): the world's largest coral reef ecosystem located off the northeast coast of Australia

GDP (Gross Domestic Product): total market value of all the final goods and services produced within a country's border, usually over one year

GHCN: the Global Historical Climatology Network, consisting of a time-varying number of globally distributed weather stations making hourly, daily, or monthly measurements of precipitation, temperature and sometimes snowfall and snow depth.

GLOBAL GREENING: the satellite-observed increase in greenness in most vegetated land areas observed since the early 1980s

GNP (Gross National Product): total market value of all the final goods and services produced by the citizens a country, usually over one year

GREENHOUSE EFFECT (GHE): the tendency for any planetary atmosphere containing greenhouse gases to be warmer in the lowest layers than if those gases did not exist.

GREENHOUSE GAS (GHG): an atmospheric gas that absorbs and emits infrared (IR) radiation, especially water vapor, CO₂, and methane.

HURST PHENOMENON: see long term persistence.

HYDROLOGY: the study of the movement of water, especially on land and the atmosphere

IAM (Integrated Assessment Model): a computerized tool that combines economics, climate science, and social sciences to provide quantitative relationships between human and Earth systems, helping to inform policy decisions

IEA: International Energy Agency

IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change): A panel of international experts and governmental representatives established by the United Nations and World Meteorological Organization in 1988 to provide governments at all levels with scientific information that they can use to develop climate policies

IR (Infrared): heat radiation that all solid objects and greenhouse gases emit by virtue of their temperature.

LA NIÑA: the cool phase of ENSO, involving stronger upwelling of cold water off the South American coast and stronger Pacific trade winds.

LONG TERM PERSISTENCE (LTP, or HURST PHENOMENON): the tendency for natural systems such as precipitation, droughts, and floods to have persisting behavior over time, as opposed to random behavior, which impacts our interpretation of long term trends in climate data as a form of autocorrelation in which random fluctuations induce long term but not permanent changes in the mean value of a series, which shows up in some climate data series as cyclical or trending patterns on short time scales

MAIZE: corn

MODEL: a computer code or collection of codes which quantify our knowledge of various processes and the interactions between those processes

MORTALITY: death or number of deaths, usually expressed for a specific population and period

NCA (National Climate Assessment): A periodic report mandated by the Global Change Research Act of 1990 summarizing the impact of climate change on the United States> There have been five NCA reports: NCA1 (2000), NCA2 (2009), NCA3 (2014), NCA4 (2017-18), and NCA5 (2023)

OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development): a specific list of 38 countries having a democratic system of government and free economics systems

PALEOCLIMATE: climate of the distant past, before modern weather instruments were widely used (typically pre-1850), necessitating the use of “proxy” measurements such as tree rings, ice core, pollen records, etc.

PDI (Power Dissipation Index): a statistical estimate of the accumulated destructive potential of a tropical cyclone over time, calculated as a summation of the cube of the maximum sustained wind speeds

PHOTOSYNTHESIS: the process by which plants grow, requiring carbon dioxide, water, and light at sufficiently warm temperatures (10 to 35 deg. C for optimal function)

PPM: parts per million, a measure of the concentration of a substance in (for example) the atmosphere

PRE-INDUSTRIAL: the historical period before which human greenhouse gas emissions were considered significant, usually assumed to be the mid-1700s

RADIATIVE FEEDBACK: a change in the balance between absorbed solar radiation and emitted infrared (IR) radiation, referenced to the top of the atmosphere, caused by changes in surface temperature

RADIATIVE FORCING: the change in the balance between absorbed solar radiation and emitted infrared (IR) radiation, referenced to the top of the atmosphere, caused by changes in greenhouse gases, anthropogenic aerosols, volcanoes, etc.

RCP SCENARIOS: Representative Concentration Pathways, different scenarios for future greenhouse gas emissions and their impact on the atmosphere, introduced in the IPCC’s Fifth Assessment Report (AR5). RCP scenarios have a number label (e.g. RCP6.0) indicating how much radiative forcing they assume in 2100 relative to pre-Industrial times, in Watts per sq. meter. RCP4.5 and RCP6.0 are intermediate scenarios, whereas RCP8.5 is an extreme scenario with very large future emissions of greenhouse gases.

REGRESSION: A statistical method for selecting the coefficients of a linear equation to explain the behaviour of a dependent variable in terms of variations in one or more explanatory variables.

RICARDIAN ANALYSIS: a method used in environmental economics named after David Ricardo to estimate the economic impacts of climate change, particularly on agriculture, by making use of the hypothesis that expected changes in the return to future agricultural activity will be capitalized into current land values.

SOCIAL COST OF CARBON (SCC): an estimate of the total economic damages, measured in dollars, caused by emitting one additional ton of CO₂ into the atmosphere

SSP SCENARIOS: Shared Socioeconomic Pathways, different scenarios for future greenhouse gas emissions and their impact on the atmosphere, introduced in the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report (AR6). Some of the SSP scenarios are analogous to the older RCP scenarios, for purposes of continuity and comparison to earlier climate model assessments.

TC: tropical cyclone

TMAX: the daily maximum surface air temperature

TMIN: the daily minimum surface air temperature

TOA: top of atmosphere

TOXICOLOGY: the study of the adverse effects of chemical substances on living organisms.

~~TREND: usually, the coefficient, usually estimated using linear regression, representing the slope of a line of best fit. linear regression slope fit to a time series of data. one of the most commonly used metrics to describe climate change over a long period of time through a time series of data, indicating any tendency for the series mean to move up or down over time.~~

UHI (Urban Heat Island): the tendency for inhabited areas to be warmer than their rural surroundings, due to the replacement of natural land and vegetation with roads, parking lots, buildings, and waste heat sources.

USHCN: the U.S. Historical Climatology Network, consisting of quality-controlled temperature and precipitation data from 1,218 surface weather stations

12 Mortality risks from heat and cold temperature extremes

12.1 Heat and cold risks

Changes in temperature extremes are among the most certain impacts expected in a warming globe -- extreme heat events are expected to become more frequent while extreme cold events become less frequent. This pattern The greatest confidence for impacts from global warming is an increase in extreme heat events and a decrease in extreme cold events, this has been observed is evident in the historical period (as discussed in Section XX) and is also expected to intensify with continued warming.

Formatted: Font: Bold

Mortality from during heat extremes is typically caused by heat stroke and heat exhaustion, while, mortality from during cold extremes is typically caused by hypothermia and heart strain. It is well known that global mortality is substantially greater for extreme cold than for extreme heat.^{1,2}

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.5", Right: 0.5"

Specifically with regards to the U.S., extreme heat and extreme cold both kill hundreds of people each year; however, different approaches to assessing heat/cold mortality produces different results. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics Compressed Mortality Database, which is based on death certificates, indicates that about twice as many people die of "excessive cold" conditions in a given year than of "excessive heat."^{3,4}

A 2015 epidemiological study of deaths in published in *The Lancet* found that cold-related deaths in the U.S. were about a factor of fifteen higher than heat-related deaths.⁵ However, the study did not adjust for the seasonal cycle in mortality rates, which tend to increase during the winter months due to non-weather factors like influenza.⁶ A more recent paper found that 86% of temperature-related deaths in the U.S. are due to cold-related mortality.⁷

¹ Qi Zhao et al., "Global, Regional, and National Burden of Mortality Associated with Non-Optimal Ambient Temperatures from 2000 to 2019: A Three-Stage Modelling Study," *The Lancet Planetary Health* 5, no. 7 (July 2021), [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2542-5196\(21\)00081-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2542-5196(21)00081-4).

² <https://ourworldindata.org/part-one-how-many-people-die-from-extreme-temperatures-and-how-could-this-change-in-the-future>

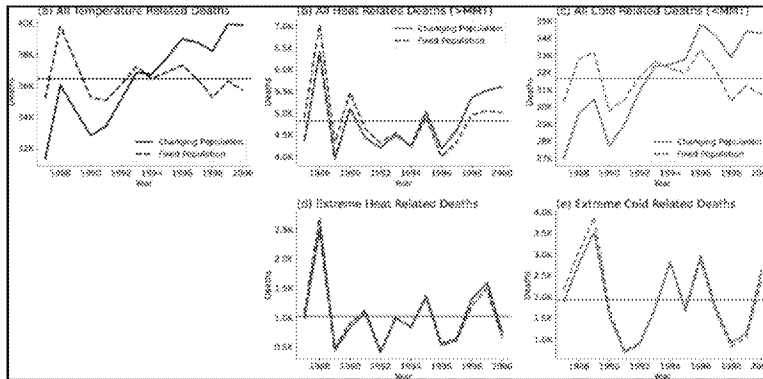
³ Brett R. Scheffers et al., "The Broad Footprint of Climate Change from Genes to Biomes to People," *Science* 354, no. 6313 (November 11, 2016): aaf7671, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaf7671>.

⁴ Rachel H. Alinsky, Scott E. Hadland, J. Deanna Wilson, Pamela A. Matson, and Brendan Sabner, "Trends in Polysubstance Overdose Deaths Involving Opioids, Stimulants, and Benzodiazepines by Race and Ethnicity in the US, 2007-2021," *JAMA Network Open* 7, no. 3 (March 2024): e238249, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.8249>.

⁵ Lancet Commission on Climate and Health, "Health and Climate Change Policy Responses to Protect Public Health," *The Lancet* 386, no. 10006 (November 7, 2015): 1861-1914, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)60854-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)60854-6).

⁶ Bob Henson, "Which Kills More People: Extreme Heat or Extreme Cold?" *Weather Underground*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.wunderground.com/cat6/Which-Kills-More-People-Extreme-Heat-or-Extreme-Cold>.

⁷ Taik Benmahnia et al., "Deaths Attributable to Heat and Cold: Comparison of Data Sources and Evaluation of Inconsistencies," *GeoHealth* 8, no. 3 (March 2024): e2023GH000799, <https://doi.org/10.1029/2023GH000799>.



Formatted: Centered

Figure 12.1: Time series of temperature-related deaths across all 106 cities. (a) The solid line represents total temperature-related deaths, while the dashed line indicates temperature-related deaths with a fixed population (average population from the 1987–2000 period). (b) Similar to (a), but for heat-related deaths. (c) Similar to (a), but for cold-related deaths. (d) Time series of deaths occurring in temperatures above the 97.5th percentile. (e) Similar to (d), but for temperatures below the 2.5th percentile. From <https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1029/2023GH000799>

Formatted: Font: Bold

Formatted: Left

The IPCC AR6 Working Group 2 Chapter 16.2.3.5 states how heat-related mortality is declining over time:⁸

“Heat-attributable mortality fractions have declined over time in most countries owing to general improvements in health care systems, increasing prevalence of residential air conditioning, and behavioral changes. These factors, which determine the susceptibility of the population to heat, have predominated over the influence of temperature change.”

A 2011 study of 40 major US cities between 1975 and 2004, found that heat wave mortality had decreased, in spite of rising temperatures, due to adaptation.⁹ Likewise Davis et al. (2003) examined heat-related mortality in 28 U.S. cities from the 1960s to the end of the 1990s and found that heat-related mortality declined by three-quarters over the sample period. Bobb et al. (2014) examined mortality data for 106 million people in over 100 cities U.S. cities and found a 60% decline in average heat-related mortality over the period 1987–2005, from 51 per thousand deaths to 19. They furthermore found that the greatest drop was among seniors over the age of 75. In a

⁸ B. O'Neill et al., “Key Risks Across Sectors and Regions,” in *Climate Change 2022: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Geneva, CH: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2021), 2411–2538.

⁹ Keith T. Ingram, Carolyn W. Fuman, and John W. Jones, “Climate Change Impact and Adaptation Assessment: A Guide for Coastal Resource Managers,” *Weather, Climate, and Society* 3, no. 4 (October 2011): 234–249, <https://doi.org/10.1175/WCAS-D-11-00055.1>.

study of 42 million deaths in 211 U.S. cities from 1962 to 2006. Nordio et al. (2015) found a more than 90 percent decline in the risk of mortality from excess heat.

Formatted: Font color: Auto

In the context of large declines in heat-related mortality, ~~By~~ reducing mortality from cold events and adapting to heat extremes, rising temperatures are associated with a net saving of lives.

It is both disappointing and telling to see how the IPCC misrepresents the situation in its AR6 Synthesis report. Section A.2.5 of that document states: "In all regions increases in extreme heat events have resulted in human mortality and morbidity (*very high confidence*)." But it is silent on the larger decline of deaths during extreme cold events.

12.2 The importance of adaptation

The observed decline in US heat-related mortality has been specifically attributed to adaptation. Wang et al. (2018) exploited the spatial variability of heatwave-related mortality across 209 U.S. cities from 1962 to 2006. While the raw data implies an increase in mortality risk during heatwaves, accounting for adaptation to heatwave intensity caused the effect to fall to near zero and become statistically insignificant. They used the results of their epidemiological model to project heat-related mortality out to 2050 under four RCP warming scenarios (including RCP8.5) with and without adaptive behavior. Assuming people continue to adapt to the heatwave risks in the regions in which they live Wang et al. project not only no increase in heat-related mortality but an overall decrease for the US as a whole. They conclude that "Ignoring adaptation would result in a substantial overestimate of future mortality related to heat waves... Accounting for adaptation, the overall heat-related mortality by 2050 would not change substantially over time compared to 2006."

12.3

Formatted: Font: Bold

Mortality risks and energy costs

Formatted: Font: Bold, Not Italic

A 2016 study of US long term mortality risks associated with temperature variations (Barreca et al. 2016) showed that increases in mortality across the US are associated both with cold weather and hot weather. But over time, the introduction of electricity and the adoption of central heating and air conditioning (AC) dramatically reduced both risks, especially those associated with hot weather. Prior to 1960, a day above 90°F (32°C) added 2.2 percent to the average mortality risk rate, but after 1960 the same weather added only 0.3 percent to mortality risk, an 85 percent reduction. Prior to 1960 temperatures below 39°F (4°C) added about 1 percent to mortality risk but after 1960 the same weather only added about half that amount. Adaptation through conventional household improvements dramatically reduced public vulnerability to weather extremes. The entire reduction in hot weather mortality was attributable to widespread adoption of indoor AC, which depended on the availability of reliable and affordable electricity.

The corollary of this finding is that the use of heating and cooling systems depends on energy being affordable. Doremus et al. (2022) showed that wealthy and poor households in the US adjust their energy expenditures at similar rates in response to moderate temperature swings, but not in response to extreme temperature swings. When temperatures swing to very cold levels ($< 5^{\circ}\text{C}$) energy spending in high-income households rises by 1.2 percent but in low-income households by only 0.5 percent. On very hot days ($>30^{\circ}\text{C}$) electricity spending in high-income households rises by 0.5 percent but does not change at all in low-income households. The latter result is observed even in subsamples where all households have AC. The implication is that even with widespread adoption of home heating and cooling systems, inability to afford energy leaves low-income households exposed to weather extremes.

Barreca, Alan, Karen Clay, Olivier Deschenes, Michael Greenstone, and Joseph S. Shapiro, "Adapting to climate change: The remarkable decline in the US temperature mortality relationship over the twentieth century," *Journal of Political Economy*, 2016, 124 (1), 105–159.

Formatted: Font: Italic

J.M. Doremus, I. Jacqz and S. Johnston (2022), "Sweating the energy bill: Extreme weather, poor households, and the energy spending gap," *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, doi: [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeeem.2022.102609>"] . . .

Formatted: Font: Italic

Nordio, Francesco, Antonella Zanobetti, Elena Colicino, Itai Kloog and Joel Schwartz (2015), "Changing patterns of the temperature–mortality association by time and location in the US, and implications for climate change" *Environment International*, Volume 81, pp 80–86 [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2015.04.009>"].

Wang, Yan, Francesco Nordio, John Nairn, Antonella Zanobetti and Joel D. Schwartz (2018) "Accounting for adaptation and intensity in projecting heat wave-related mortality" *Environmental Research* 161 pp. 464–471. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2017.11.049>"]

Bobb JF, Peng RD, Bell ML, Dominici F. (2014) Heat-related mortality and adaptation to heat in the United States. *Environmental Health Perspectives* 122:811–816; [HYPERLINK "<https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/full/10.1289/ehp.1307392>"]

Davis, Robert E., Paul C. Knappenberger, Patrick J. Michaels and Wendy M. Novicoff (2003) "Changing Heat-Related Mortality in the United States" *Environmental Health Perspectives* 111(14) November 2003 pp. 1712–1718.

Review of the Fifth National Climate Assessment

[TOC \O "1-3" \H \Z \U]

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 About this Report

This report responds to a request from OSTP Director Michael Kratsios (reproduced in Appendix XX) that we assess the suitability of the Fifth National Climate Assessment for informing climate and energy policies.

To conduct this assessment we reviewed NCA5 itself, NASEM review of the Third Order Draft and the USGCRP responses to the review. We have drawn upon our long experience working on advisory reports, including for the NASEM, IPCC and other organizations, as writers, reviewers and project leaders.

We find that NCA5 should not be relied on for policy making as it is an incomplete and misleading picture of our understanding of the changing climate and the risks it poses to the nation. NCA5 was selective and incomplete in its survey of the science as of its publication date in 2023 and has become even more so in the years since. We have reviewed many key scientific developments in a separate report to Energy Secretary Wright (Climate Working Group 2025, herein denoted "CWG25"). The overall effect of ~~its~~ ~~the~~ biases and omissions ~~of NCA5~~ is an excessively dire picture of climate risk.

Our report begins with background on the National Climate Assessments. We then discuss the standards by which we have assessed NCA5, followed by specific deficiencies that we have ~~identified~~ identified.

1.2 About the National Climate Assessments

The U.S. Global Change Research Program (USGCRP) was established by Presidential Initiative in 1989 and mandated by Congress in the Global Change Research Act (GCRA) of 1990 to develop and coordinate "a comprehensive and integrated United States research program which will assist the Nation and the world to understand, assess, predict, and respond to human-induced and natural processes of global change."

The National Climate Assessment (NCA) Reports evolved from the GCRA requirement to

Prepare and submit to the President and the Congress an assessment which (1) integrates, evaluates, and interprets the findings of the Program and discusses the scientific uncertainties associated with such findings; (2) analyzes the effects of global change on the natural environment, agriculture, energy production and use, land and water resources, transportation, human health and welfare, human social systems, and biological diversity; and (3) analyzes current trends in global change, both human-induced and natural, and projects major trends for the subsequent 25 to 100 years.

The five NCA Reports to date have interpreted this mandate in different ways:

- NCA1 (2000) was a multidisciplinary effort to study and portray in regional detail the potential effects of human-induced global warming on the United States.
- NCA2 (2009) was a relatively short report that not only focused on the potential consequences of climate change, but also sought to identify potential adaptation measures and identify the highest priorities for future research.

- NCA3 (2014) was an expanded effort that continued along the lines of NCA2, and was distinguished by a comprehensive review process, including a review by the National Academy of Sciences.
- NCA4 (2017/2018) was an expanded effort published in two volumes: I Climate Science Special Report, and II Impacts, Risk, and Adaptation in the United States. This was the first NCA report to devote significant effort to assessing climate science. NCA4 introduced a traceability analysis for each key finding, including a cursory description of uncertainties.
- NCA5 (2023) returned to a single volume format, reducing discussion of climate science to a cursory two chapters, with continuing with a focus on regional and sectoral impacts of climate change. NCA5 expanded its remit to topics that are arguably outside the purview of the USGCRP, focusing on "Climate Action" and policy recommendations with a social justice emphasis. NCA5's self-description is reproduced as Appendix II.

These successive interpretations of the NCA are poorly aligned with the GCRA's statutory requirements. Only NCA4 gives serious consideration to climate science, which receives the great majority of USGCRP funding, and even then misrepresents some important points (see the Box nearby for an example). Natural climate variability is essentially dismissed as unimportant in NCA4 and barely mentioned in NCA5 in most contexts, despite the mandate to include both human-caused and natural climate change. Most significantly, NCA5 has redirected the focus away from climate science and even the hazard elements of impacts, towards evaluation of societal vulnerabilities and advocacy for particular policy options, especially wind and solar power. The cover image for the NCA5 Report is the installation of a solar panel.

1.3 Standards for Assessing NCA Products

Good climate and energy policies will balance the risks and benefits of a changing climate against the world's growing demand for reliable and affordable energy. To strike that balance, policymakers must understand at least two complex and nuanced topics—the certainties and uncertainties of climate science and the technoeconomic realities of energy systems. Experts in those subjects are the only people who can bring the facts to the discussion and so have a unique responsibility to communicate their understanding to non-experts clearly, completely, and without bias.

Expertise in energy systems resides largely in the private sector, where it is essential to providing the reliable and affordable energy services that are the lifeblood of society. Understanding is therefore continually refined and tested by the discipline of the marketplace. In contrast, climate science expertise is found largely in the non-profit realm of universities and government laboratories and so has a more academic character.

Because climate is at the core of human existence, it can engender passion and emotion. Indeed, some younger climate scientists have gone into the field to "save the planet." So it isn't surprising that objectivity can suffer when climate scientists communicate their understanding to non-experts. Further, the field of climate science has been politicized by NetZero mandates. When that happens, it. This lack of objectivity usurps the public's right to make informed choices and undermines their confidence in the scientific enterprise.

Philip Handler, President of the National Academy of Sciences, identified the problem in a 1990 [HYPERLINK "<https://science.sciencemag.org/content/208/4448/1093>"] that resonates eerily four decades later:

Difficulty arises in the scientific community from confusion of the role of scientist ~~and~~ scientist with that of scientist-citizen, confusion of the ethical code of the scientist with the obligation of the citizen, blurring the distinction between intrinsically scientific and intrinsically political questions. When scientists fail to recognize these boundaries, their own ideological beliefs, usually unspoken, easily bedcloud seemingly scientific debate.

In Appendix XX we include a letter of guidance from the Office of General Counsel, U.S. Department of Energy, summarizing the extent of statutory requirements governing USGCRP work products in general and NCA products in particular.

We can summarize the standards applicable to the NCA as follows:
- details.

Beyond the statutory requirements we draw attention to two other pertinent standards. President Trump's executive order of May 23, 2025, "[[HYPERLINK "https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/05/restoring-gold-standard-science/"](https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/05/restoring-gold-standard-science/)]" enumerates some of the characteristics of good science:

- i. reproducible;
- ii. transparent;
- iii. communicative of error and uncertainty;
- iv. collaborative and interdisciplinary;
- v. skeptical of its findings and assumptions;
- vi. structured for falsifiability of hypotheses;
- vii. subject to unbiased peer review;
- viii. accepting of negative results as positive outcomes; and
- ix. without conflicts of interest.

Although these should be self-evident to those trained in science, it is surprising that some have found them [[HYPERLINK "https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/29/trump-american-science"](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/29/trump-american-science)].

~~Finally we~~ We consider that when scientific reports are being assembled that will be highly influential on climate policymaking there are other desiderata, including statements about the strength of climate knowledge. The IPCC's approach is based on judgment of the available evidence and agreement among experts. More sophisticated knowledge characterizations for risk management include: [REFERENCE AVEN](#)

- The degree to which the assumptions made are reasonable/realistic based on background knowledge—concern about the focus on implausible emissions scenarios RCP8.5/SSP5-8.5
- The degree to which data/information exists and are reliable and relevant—the historical and paleo database is inadequate for a complete characterization of natural climate variability on multi-decadal to millennial time scales
- The degree to which there is disagreement among experts (including those from different environments or academic fields)—attempts to suppress disagreement and alternative perspectives among experts

Commented [A1]: Terje Aven, "Improving Risk Characterisations in Practical Situations by Highlighting Knowledge Aspects, with Applications to Risk Matrices," Reliability Engineering & System Safety 167 (November 2017): 42-48

[[HYPERLINK "https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0951832016306950"](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0951832016306950)]

Formatted: Font color: Auto

- The degree to which the phenomena involved are understood and accurate models exist—concerns about the fidelity and utility of climate models
- The degree to which the knowledge has been thoroughly examined with respect to unknown knowns and—neglect of the unknown knowns associated with natural climate variability

Good climate and energy policies will balance the risks and benefits of a changing climate against the world's growing demand for reliable and affordable energy. To strike that balance, policymakers must understand at least two complex and nuanced topics: the certainties and uncertainties of climate science and the technoeconomic realities of energy systems. Experts in those subjects have a unique responsibility to communicate their understanding to non-experts clearly, completely, and without bias.

Expertise in energy systems resides largely in the private sector, where it is essential to providing the reliable and affordable energy services that are the lifeblood of society. Understanding is therefore continually refined and tested by the discipline of the marketplace. In contrast, climate science expertise is found largely in the non-profit realm of universities and government laboratories and so has a more academic character.

Because climate is at the core of human existence, it can engender passion and emotion. Indeed, some younger climate scientists have gone into the field to "save the planet." So it isn't surprising that objectivity can suffer when climate scientists communicate their understanding to non-experts. Further, the field of climate science has been politicized by NetZero mandates. This lack of objectivity usurps the public's right to make informed choices and undermines their confidence in the scientific enterprise.

Philip Handler, President of the National Academy of Sciences, identified the problem in a 1980 [HYPERLINK "<https://science.sciencemag.org/content/208/4448/1093>"] that resonates eerily four decades later:

Difficulty arises in the scientific community from confusion of the role of scientist *qua* scientist with that of scientist as citizen, confusion of the ethical code of the scientist with the obligation of the citizen, blurring the distinction between intrinsically scientific and intrinsically political questions. When scientists fail to recognize these boundaries, their own ideological beliefs, usually unspoken, easily becloud seemingly scientific debate.

1.4 When Peer-Review Fails: An Example from NCA4

Peer-review of reports like IPCC and NCA products is not a silver bullet that guarantees quality. The peer review process for these reports differs in some important respects from traditional peer review in academic journals. First, NCA reviewers self-select on a volunteer basis whether to provide comments and what parts of the report to read, whereas in academic journals Editors recruit reviewers and assign them to specific papers. There is no guarantee that any particular section of an NCA report was reviewed by anyone, let alone by someone with a different perspective than the authors. This is a problem with NCA and IPCC reports since over the years many potential reviewers have given up making the effort, because their input has systematically been ignored. Second, and related, NCA authors have near complete authority whether to accept or reject review comments. Here, for example, is how a review comment critical of a section of the NCA5 draft was handled by the authors:

Formatted: Heading 2, Space After: 0 pt, Border: Bottom: (No border)

REVIEWER COMMENT

Tropical Cyclones/hurricanes have not increased (Klotzbach, P.J., Bowen, S.G., Pielke, R. and Bell, M., 2018. Continental US hurricane landfall frequency and associated damage: Observations and future risks. Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society, 99(7), pp.1359-1376., Pielke, R., 2021. Economic Anormalisation, Aóof disaster losses 1998, A2020: A literature review and assessment. Environmental Hazards, 20(2), pp.93-111.)

US NCA RESPONSE

Thank you for your comment.

This comment is inconsistent with the author team's thorough assessment of the science.

By contrast, in academic journals the Editor mandates the authors' response and the reviewer gets to assess its adequacy. Third, once an NCA chapter author team has been selected publication of their work is guaranteed, whereas academic journals routinely reject papers if they do not pass review.

These points are important to bear in mind because some readers might dismiss any criticism of NCA products out of hand on the grounds that they were "peer reviewed". But the test of a report is whether its contents are a valid representation of the available evidence. Here we give an example in which NCA4 gave prominence to a Figure that completely misrepresented the underlying data and which evaded peer review to do so. Further

START BOX

NCA4's Figure ES.5: A Tale of Deception and Review Failure

A disappointing example of NCA4's misrepresentation of climate science involves U.S. temperature extremes. Here is a summary of the issue; details can be found in Koonin (2024).

As we pointed out in CWG25 Section 6.3 the number of heat extremes in the U.S. peaked in the 1930s and has declined ever since. Taking cold and hot extremes together the U.S. climate has become more moderate over time. NCA4's Part I (Climate Science Special Report, CCSR) says (prominently and with *Very High Confidence*) on Page 19 of the Executive Summary:

There have been marked changes in temperature extremes across the contiguous United States. The number of high temperature records set in the past two decades far exceeds the number of low temperature records.

and offers this figure in support:

Record Warm Daily Temperatures Are Occurring More Often

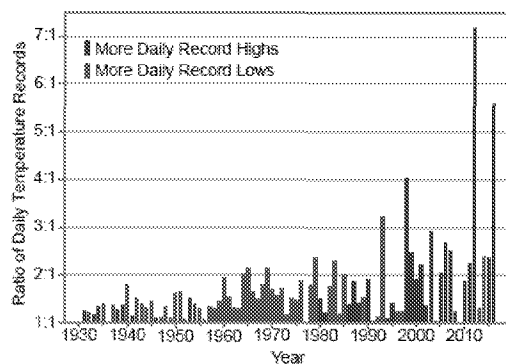
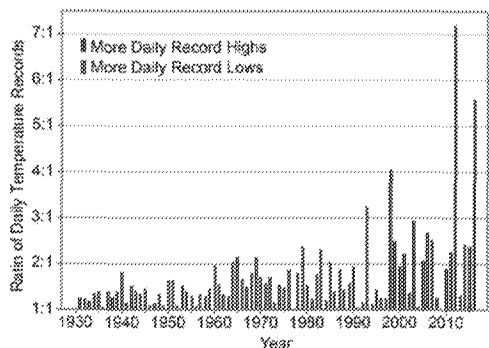


Figure ES.5: Observed changes in the occurrence of record-setting daily temperatures in the contiguous United States. Red bars indicate a year with more daily record highs than daily record lows, while blue bars indicate a year with more record lows than highs. The height of the bar indicates the ratio of record highs to lows (red) or of record lows to highs (blue). For example, a ratio of 2:1 for a blue bar means that there were twice as many record daily lows as daily record highs that year. (Figure source: NOAA/NCEI). From Figure 6.5 in Chapter 6.

Record Warm Daily Temperatures Are Occurring More Often



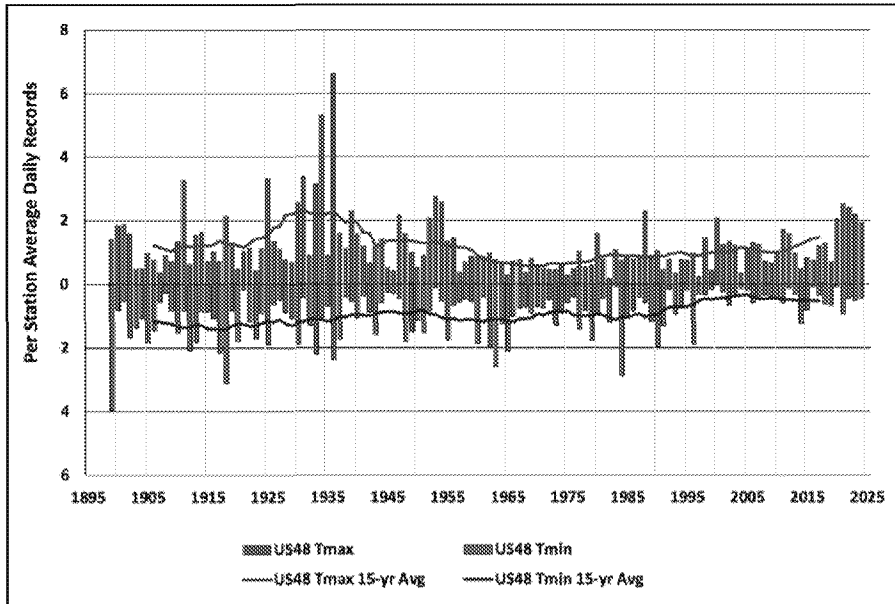
The Figure appears to validate the claim that, as the title says, record warm daily temperatures are occurring more often. But the underlying data do not: they show that extreme heat in the U.S. peaked in the 1920s and 1930s and declined thereafter, as NCA4 Figure 6.4 later shows. Figure ES.5 does not show what its title implies: these are not simple counts of cold and warm extreme events, instead they are ratios of the two. In fact both types of extremes declined over the sample interval but cold events declined more than warm events, so the ratio of warm extremes to cold extremes went up. By graphing the ratio in this way the NCA4 created a visual impression opposite to what is in the data. CSSR-Figure ES.5 The ratio of the number of daily record high temperatures to daily record low temperatures for many stations across the 48 contiguous states is shown for each year from 1920 to

2017. The lighter bars show a year in which there were more record highs than lows, while the darker bars show years in which there were more record lows than highs. The height of the bar indicates the ratio of record highs to record lows for each year. For example, a ratio of 2:1 for a dark bar means that the stations had twice as many record daily lows as record daily highs for that year. (CSSR, 2017)

Commented [A2]: Cite CSSR

Three idiosyncratic choices combine to generate the figure's seemingly alarming rise in recent decades. First, because the record extremes tallied are defined conventionally (i.e., each more extreme than any preceding value in the history), the numbers of record highs and record lows are both expected to decline through the years (it becomes increasingly unlikely that a record will be exceeded). Second, the graph displays not the numbers of record highs and lows, but rather their ratio. And finally, the history begins only in 1930 when, in fact, data exist beginning in the late 19th Century. The upshot of these choices is that the resultant figure is guaranteed to show a long period of quiescence around followed by dramatic variations, creating the impression of large changes in recent decades, even if they aren't present.

Figure 6.3.3 of our report [CWG25](#) (reproduced below) shows the results of a proper analysis – defining each record as the singular extreme in the history, displaying numbers of warm and cold records separately, and beginning the analysis in 1899 rather than 1930. It makes evident the exceptional heat of the 1920s and especially the 1930s, peaking in 1936. The increased heat of the past five years is too brief to be deemed climatically significant and, in any event, occurred after the CSSR was published in 2017. On the cold side, the Valentine's Day Arctic outbreak in Feb 1899 stands as the most extensive cold extreme experienced by CONUS, with 1917 in 2nd place. The frequency of cold records has declined, especially over the last quarter of the period in which only 13 percent of the extreme cold events were measured. In contrast, 25 percent of the extreme Tmax records were achieved in the last quarter, in accordance which is consistent with statistical expectations. As a result, the ratio shown in the CSSR explodes in recent decades. And – The overall reduction in numbers of both cold and hot extremes over the past century indicates a climate less prone to extremes, in sharp contrast to the title of the CSSR figure, "Record Warm Daily Temperatures Are Occurring More Often" the message of the NCA4 Figure.



Number of daily record High (red) and Low (blue) temperatures for warm and cold seasons in the CONUS. The lines represent the 15-year running, centered average. Source: 1,211 USHCN stations supplemented as needed to achieve a minimum of 92 percent of observations in the 126-year period since Dec 1898. US48: contiguous U.S. states. Tmax: maximum temperature. Tmin: minimum temperature. Source: CWG25 Figure 6.3.3.

The National Academies' expert review panel [[HYPERLINK "https://www.nap.edu/catalog/24712/review-of-the-draft-climate-science-special-report"](https://www.nap.edu/catalog/24712/review-of-the-draft-climate-science-special-report)] the discussion of temperature extremes in a [[HYPERLINK "https://biotech.law.lsu.edu/blog/Draft-of-the-Climate-Science-Special-Report.pdf"](https://biotech.law.lsu.edu/blog/Draft-of-the-Climate-Science-Special-Report.pdf)] of the CSSR. In reference to the CSSR's Key Finding 2 of Chapter 6, they said:

Further, it is difficult to understand how a statement that includes increases in extreme warmth can be associated with a high confidence or extremely likely statement, given that most of the graphics in this chapter show a decrease in extreme warmth in the historical record.

The Federal official in charge of the CSSR (Michael Kuperberg, Executive Director of the USGCRP) [[HYPERLINK "https://science2017.globalchange.gov/PDFs/CSSR-NASresponse_110217.pdf"](https://science2017.globalchange.gov/PDFs/CSSR-NASresponse_110217.pdf)] to the Academies' review by noting that

Almost every recommendation from the NAS was incorporated [in the final version]... and a new figure was added on changes in record high and low temperatures

The "new figure" referred to is the Figure ES.5, which did not appear in the draft reviewed by the Academies' panel. It seems unlikely that the Academies panel ever saw that figure because they

surely would have commented if they had and it wouldn't have survived to publication. And the figure's problems were evidently not flagged (or were ignored) in the subsequent internal government reviews.

While the following statement has far less headline potential than that from the CSSR's page 19 quoted at the beginning of this box, it has advantage of being correct:

There have been some changes in temperature extremes across the contiguous United States. The annual number of high temperature records set shows no significant trend over the past century [or over the past 40 years] but the annual number of record cold nights has declined by a factor of 4 since 1895, somewhat more rapidly in the past 30 years.

Commented [A3]: Check this statement

Commented [A4R3]: R^2 is 0.02, so not significant for 1978-2017.

END BOX

With this background we now present our critique of NCA5.

2 OVERVIEW CHAPTER: HYPERBOLIC ADVOCACY LANGUAGE AND NON-SCIENTIFIC TONE

The opening Chapter 1 "Overview" holds a prominent place since it serves as a summary of summarizes the whole report and is all the only section that many will read. While Although the later Chapters of NCA5 contain there is much sound scholarly content, in the later sections of NCA5, Chapter 1 is marred by a pervasive tone and language aggressively use of advocacy language and a tone overly focused on promoting aggressive emission reduction policies. The authors must have known this chapter would be mined for quotes by the media and activists looking to add an imprimatur of scientific authority to oversimplified declarations of opinion. Many examples can be cited; here we provide note a few that are particularly egregious ones.

The chapter Chapter 1 opens as follows:

The more the planet warms, the greater the impacts. Without rapid and deep reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions from human activities, the risks of accelerating sea level rise, intensifying extreme weather, and other harmful climate impacts will continue to grow. Each additional increment of warming is expected to lead to more damage and greater economic losses compared to previous increments of warming, while the risk of catastrophic or unforeseen consequences also increases.

[This statement presupposes all warming is anthropogenic in origin, all warming is bad and causes economic damage, warming causes extreme weather to intensify. Such sweeping generalizations go well beyond what science has or can establish.] A scientifically-sound version of this paragraph would instead say something like the following:

Commented [SK5]: There's also no quantification. Perhaps risks increase, but how big were they to begin with?

The Earth is undergoing a warming trend caused because of by a combination of natural and anthropogenic influences. This warming can be expected to will generate a mix of benefits and harms that varies by region, to which society should be prepared to adapt. There is evidence that Some types of extreme weather have worsened recently, while others have not changed or have even declined in intensity. Reducing emissions of greenhouse gases can might slow the warming process although such policies have proven to be very expensive costly and disruptive, so the costs need any climate actions to be weighed against the potential benefits.

On the next page the Overview goes on to say:

Each additional increment of warming leads to greater risks [here it lists 7 key components of society including food security and the economy]... Without deeper cuts in global net emissions, climate risks to the US will continue to grow... Action to limit future warming and reduce risks can have near-term benefits and opportunities: low-carbon energy jobs, Improved air quality, Health benefits, Economic benefits..."

The authors write as if climate policy does not involve trade-offs and all measures to reduce future warming will be effective and beneficial. But the vast body of scholarship on climate science and economics does not support such simplistic claims. Not every additional increment of warming leads to economic harms, indeed (as is acknowledged in Chapter 19 on Economics) in some cases it is

~~expected to yield benefits there will be benefits. Nor is climate policy guaranteed to create jobs or benefit the economy; in many cases it has done the opposite. Such deceit is~~ It is a disservice to policymakers ~~not to be honest about this.~~

Page 9 promotes renewable energy options by ~~arguing~~ noting, correctly, that the “levelized” costs of wind/ and solar power generation have fallen sharply since 2010. But “levelized” refers to the lifetime project cost averaged over all power production and ignores the intermittency problem: namely solar and wind are not always available. It results in an invalid comparison since even if, for instance, the levelized cost of solar energy per megawatt-hour falls below that of coal, coal power is available continuously and on demand whereas solar is not. The proper comparison would adjust for the difference in availability by considering the cost of supplementing solar and wind with backup natural gas-fired systems or battery storage, and on that basis renewable energy remains prohibitively expensive. Yet it has long been known that intermittent renewables generation must be supplemented by dispatchable generation to meet grid reliability standards, and that doing so (e.g., through gas, fission, or storage) more than doubles the cost of electricity. Further, there are yet unmet synchronization challenges in wind/solar-heavy grids. Here again it is a disservice to readers ~~advisory malpractice not to acknowledge these facts.~~

Page 14 presents future emission scenarios with the following description: “Climate modeling experts develop global climate projections for a range of plausible futures.” The word “plausible” is applied to all the scenarios. The accompanying Figure includes both SSP3-7.0 and SSP5-8.5, the latter reaching the same radiative forcing as RCP8.5. The figure does not contrast observed emissions against ~~model~~ previous projections nor does it caution readers that SSP3-7.0 and SSP5-8.5 are extreme worst case scenarios that, like RCP8.5, have been heavily criticized in the scientific literature (CWG25 3.2.1). By describing the entire envelope of emission projections as “plausible” the report opens the door to later presenting impacts associated with extreme and implausible emission scenarios as part of a baseline “business-as-usual” future.

Commented [SK6]: Perhaps we should cite the relevant text from NCA5 Box 1.1 (pg 1-8): Recent growth in the capacities of wind, solar, and battery storage technologies is supported by rapidly falling costs of zero- and low-carbon energy technologies, which can support even deeper emissions reductions. For example, wind and solar energy costs dropped 70% and 90%, respectively, over the last decade, while 80% of new generation capacity in 2020 came from renewable sources (Figures 1.2, 1.3). (5.3, 12.3, 32.1, 32.2; Figure A4.17)

Commented [SK7]: Didn't AR6 WG1 deem 7.0 and 8.5 scenarios “low likelihood”?

[We could criticize Figure 1.6, which uses an anecdote to support its 1200 claim.]

Page 17 (and elsewhere) invokes the NOAA Billion Dollar Dataset as an indicator of extreme weather getting worse. Scientists have shown that this is an invalid metric (CWG 10.2) [since it measures the growth of the economy not the frequency of extreme weather] and indeed NOAA has withdrawn the data product. Even though it was still distributed by NOAA at the time of the NCA5, the report authors should have assessed it skeptically and seen that it was unfit for the purpose of measuring climate trends.

Commented [SK8]: They actually say this, sort of, on pg 1-17, but don't make the effort to untangle hazard vs risk, and go on to blame it all on climate change

Page 23 states, in large font:

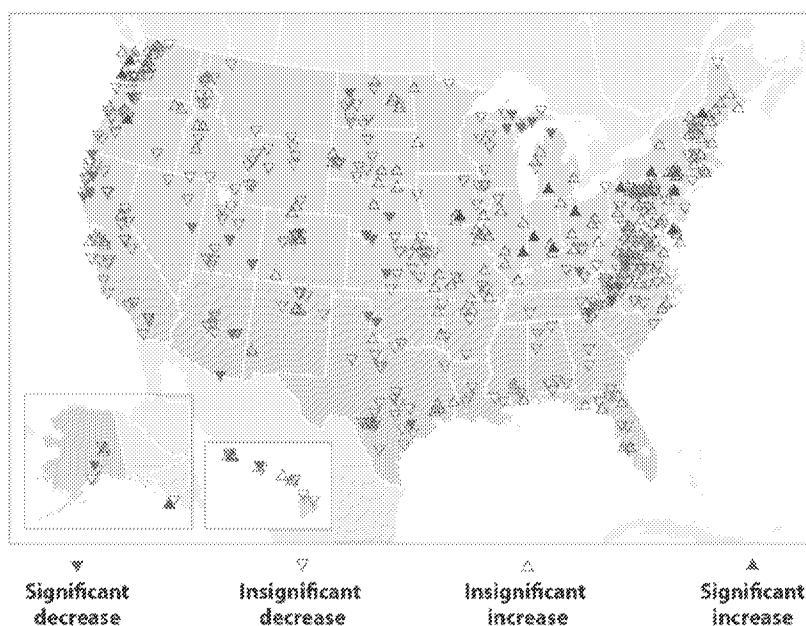
Climate changes are making it harder to maintain safe homes and healthy families; reliable public services; a sustainable economy; thriving ecosystems, cultures, and traditions; and strong communities.

Commented [SK9]: Some climate changes are benign or even beneficial.

It is pointless to try to evaluate this statement on scholarly grounds; it is self-evidently hyperbolic. This kind of language doesn't belong in a scientific assessment report. Its prominent inclusion points not only to the willingness of NCA5 authors to promote hysteria, but also the ineffectiveness of the review process at not ensuring such statements are removed.

We won't try to cite all the remaining examples of advocacy and hyperbole in the Overview chapter; one more example will suffice. Page 26 states “Increasing flooding puts more people and assets at

risk.” The accompanying figure contrasts model-projected flood losses by county in 2050 to that observed in 2020 as estimated in Wing *et al.* (2022)¹. Hence the evidence for the claim is not currently-observed trends, it is a model-generated projection of changes. But current trends in U.S.-based flooding reveal a more complex picture with a general overall trend towards less flooding. The Environmental Protection Agency’s “Climate Change Indicators: River Flooding” webpage² shows maps both of flood magnitude and frequency. Both show more regions experiencing declines over 1965-2015 than increases. Hence current trends indicate generally declining U.S. flood risks, but the NCA5 Overview not only fails to mention this but declares the opposite based on a single study presenting model-generated forecasts of flood activity decades in the future.



U.S. Flood magnitude trends 1965-2015.

Source: [HYPERLINK "<https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-river-flooding>"]

¹ Wing, Oliver, William Lehman, Paul Bates *et al.* (2022) Inequitable patterns of US flood risk in the Anthropocene. *Nature Climate Change* 12 156—162 [HYPERLINK "<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-021-01265-6>"]

² [HYPERLINK "<https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-river-flooding>"]

3 ONE-SIDED OVERSIMPLIFICATIONS IN SCIENCE SUMMARY CHAPTERS OVERCONFIDENCE WHEN STATING CONCLUSIONS

Chapters 2 (Climate Trends) and 3 (Earth Systems Processes) form the scientific core of NCA5. As we will show in the following examples, they fail to meet statutory requirements to discuss scientific uncertainties and the role of natural variability, and they fail to meet the more stringent implicit standards expected of a policymaking policy-informing report.

3.1 Inappropriate Certainty Grading Inflated Certainty Levels

A general pattern in the NCA5 is overconfidence in stating conclusions. The authors frequently make sweeping generalizations without appropriate caveats or acknowledging uncertainties. The overconfidence begins with inflated certainty levels.

The NCA5 uses specific terms to convey information about scientific confidence associated with important finds, observations and projections. The Front Matter of the NCA5 states that “confidence in a finding is based on the type, amount, quality, strength, and consistency of evidence; the skill, range, and consistency of methods to detect, evaluate, attribute, and interpret climate trends; and the degree of agreement across scientific information sources.”

Table 1 provides calibrated language for confidence assessment:

Very high:-	Strong evidence (established theory, multiple sources, well documented and accepted methods, etc.). High consensus
High:-	Moderate evidence (several sources, some consistency, methods vary and/or documentation limited, etc.). Medium consensus
Medium:-	Suggestive evidence (a few sources, limited consistency, methods emerging, etc.) Competing schools of thought
Low:-	Inconclusive evidence (limited sources, extrapolations, inconsistent findings, poor documentation and/or methods not tested, etc.). Disagreement or lack of opinions among experts.

This terminology is inflated: *high confidence* with just moderate evidence and medium consensus; *medium confidence* with only ~~suggested~~ *suggestive* evidence and competing schools of thought. This inflation in terminology leads to overconfidence in the conclusions.

Even within the context of this inflated terminology, NCA5 further inflates the confidence level of many of its conclusions to well beyond what the IPCC has concluded with more thorough justification, and also by incorrectly applying its own standards. Several illustrative examples are provided.

Key Message 3.1 Traceable Account states: “There is *very high confidence* that emissions of GHGs from human activities, fossil fuel use in particular, have unequivocally caused *all* global warming observed over the industrial era.” Compare the NCA5 ~~this~~ statement with statements from the IPCC AR5 and AR6:

AR5: "It is *extremely likely* that *more than half* of the observed increase in global average surface temperature from 1951 to 2010 was caused by the anthropogenic increase in greenhouse gas concentrations and other anthropogenic forcings together." (IPCC, 2013)

AR6: "The *likely* range of total human-caused global surface temperature increase from 1850–1900 to 2010–2019 is 0.8°C to 1.3°C, with a best estimate of 1.07°C. It is *likely* that well-mixed GHGs contributed a warming of 1.0°C to 2.0°C, other human drivers (principally aerosols) contributed a cooling of 0.0°C to 0.8°C, natural drivers changed global surface temperature by –0.1°C to +0.1°C, and internal variability changed it by –0.2°C to +0.2°C. It is *very likely* that well-mixed GHGs were the main driver of tropospheric warmings since 1979." (IPCC, 2021)

The IPCC AR5 and AR6 statements provide likelihood assessments but not a confidence level. While the NCA5 claims with *very high confidence* that fossil fuels have unequivocally caused *all* global warming, the AR5 refers to "*more than half* of the observed warming" and the AR6 provides a more nuanced statement that relates to a *likely* range of warming contributed to by human drivers.

NCA5 Key message 2.2:– "Hurricanes have been intensifying more rapidly since the 1980s (*high confidence*) and causing heavier rainfall and higher storm surges (*high confidence*)."

No justification is provided in Chapter 2 for the *high confidence* conclusion on higher storm surges or hurricanes causing heavier precipitation. The Traceable Accounts section, Description of Confidence and Likelihood states:—"Basic physical understanding and climate models both provide robust explanations for the links between climate change and observed changes in these extremes: this is why the authors also have *high confidence* that storms are delivering more rainfall and high confidence that storm surges are becoming higher." In short, the NCA5 provides no observational basis or published research for their *high confidence* assertions that hurricanes are causing heavier rainfall and higher storm surges; and does not meet its own standards for a *high confidence level*.

3.2 Range of Increased Lower Bound of Climate Sensitivity

~~The promotional tone of Chapter 1 is carried forward into Chapter 3 (Earth System Processes) where it states, on page 3-10, Key Message 3.2: "The Estimated Range of Climate Sensitivity Has Narrowed by 50%". Referring to Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity (ECS) the section elaborates:~~

Recent improvements in the understanding of how climate feedbacks vary across timescales have narrowed the estimated *likely* range of warming expected from a doubling of atmospheric carbon dioxide by 50% to between 4.5°F and 7.2°F (*high confidence*).... This uncertainty reduction results from advances in combining observations and targeted modeling results from nearly independent lines of evidence, each of which generally agrees on the values of ECS. The lines of evidence include 1) observed present-day variations on monthly to interannual timescales from which cloud and other climate feedbacks are inferred; 2) observed temperature changes between the preindustrial period and present and associated relationships to ERF; and 3) estimated temperature and radiative forcing changes for multiple warm and cold periods in paleoclimate records.

The graphic summary on page 3-11 states

The reduced uncertainty in climate sensitivity and climate feedback has been achieved through unprecedented quantitative synthesis of evidence from observed changes over recent decades, the industrial era, and paleoclimate.

This is a ~~very grossly~~ inadequate description of the situation. The key development in AR6 was a *reduction* of confidence in the ability of climate models to identify ECS and the shift away from the model-based method the IPCC had relied on since AR1 in 1990. The IPCC instead turned to data-driven ECS estimation and specifically chose a single paper from the scientific literature, Sherwood *et al.* (2020³) for the purpose. It combined paleoclimate data, modern instrumental data and modern observations of climate processes, mainly cloud-related, that govern key feedbacks. Sherwood *et al.* used a subjective Bayesian method to determine the likely range of ECS values. The Bayesian approach begins with the researcher specifying a “prior”, namely an expectation of ~~the likely distribution of what the answers will be~~ before seeing the data. In this case the prior consists of an expected ECS range based on the researchers’ subjective beliefs. Then the data are allowed to influence the ECS distribution and the final result is a weighted average of the assumed prior and the data-driven result. Sherwood *et al.* found a best (or median) ECS estimate of 5.4°F (3°C), which was close to previous model-based estimates but raised the likely lower bound by 1.7°F from 2.5°F to 4.2°F. The IPCC accepted this result and increased the best estimate to 3.1°C.

The NCA5 was published in November 2023. Well before that, in September 2022, Lewis (2023) had been published online at *Climate Dynamics* presenting a forceful critique of Sherwood *et al.*⁴ One of Lewis’ points was that Sherwood *et al.*’s result was dependent on their chosen subjective prior. Lewis recommended using an objective Bayesian method, which places primary weight on the data rather than the researcher’s expectation. Using that and updated forcing data from AR6, Lewis estimated an ECS best estimate of ~~3.74.0°F~~ (2.2°C) with a likely lower bound of ~~2.9°F~~ (1.6°C).

Hence, in contrast to the promotional language of Chapter 3 a more valid summary of the ECS literature as it stood at the time of writing the NCA5 would be what we wrote in CWG25 (emphasis added):

For the AR6, the IPCC placed primary weight on the results of Sherwood *et al.* (2020) that combined historical and paleoclimate proxies with the process-based approach and yielded a best estimate of 3.1°C with a *likely* range of 2.6-3.9°C. Lewis (2022) raised a number of concerns about this result, including methodological errors, outdated input values, and use of subjective versus objective Bayesian priors in the analysis. Lewis’ analysis found that climate sensitivity is estimated to be much lower and better constrained than in the Sherwood *et al.* analysis – median 2.2°C (1.8–2.7°C in the 17–83 percent *likely* range, and 1.6–3.2°C in the 5–95 percent *very likely* range). **The IPCC AR6 estimated only a 5 percent probability that ECS was below 2.3°C, whereas Lewis estimated it to be over 50 percent.** The most recent publications on the debate between Sherwood *et al.* and Lewis further defend their respective positions: Sherwood and Foster (2024) and Lewis (2025).

~~3.3 Presenting New Emission Scenarios as a Scientific~~ ~~scientific “Advancement”~~

³ Sherwood, S. C., Bony, S., Boucher, O., Bretherton, C. S., Forster, P. M., Gregory, J. M., & Stevens, B. (2020). An assessment of Earth’s climate sensitivity using multiple lines of evidence. *Reviews of Geophysics*, 58(4). [HYPERLINK “https://doi.org/10.1029/2019rg000678”]

⁴ Lewis, N. (2023). Objectively combining climate sensitivity evidence. *Climate Dynamics*, 61(9–10), 3155–3163. [HYPERLINK “https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-022-06398-8”]. The final citation for this paper is Lewis (2023) because the print edition did not appear until 2023, but the article was accepted in August 2022 and the online edition appeared and was in circulation in September 2022.

Chapter 3 pp. 13-14 treats the release of new emission scenarios as a scientific “advance” without addressing the failure of many previous scenarios to match reality or providing an honest assessment of the likelihood that the new ones ~~are~~ remain biased in the same way.

Key Message 3.3 states “New Data and Analysis Methods Have Advanced Climate Science” and includes the following:

New scenarios of socioeconomic development, and their associated emissions and land-use changes, drive updated climate projections from Earth system models. The Scenario Model Intercomparison Project (ScenarioMIP) organized the main set of 21st-century projection experiments under the latest phase of the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project, CMIP6. These CMIP6 projections used newly developed scenarios based on Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSPs; Figure 3.4). Five SSPs represent alternative plausible trajectories of 21st-century GDP and population growth and the pace and pervasiveness of socioeconomic and technological progress within individual nations and across the world (see Table 3 in the Guide to the Report). SSP-specific drivers are used in integrated assessment models (IAMs) to simulate the corresponding evolution of the energy system and the resulting greenhouse gas trajectories. These are in turn used by ESMS to drive their 21st-century projections.

There is nothing wrong with NCA5 discussing the development of new emission scenarios which serve as inputs to climate change projections and impact studies. But it is a serious omission not to inform the reader of the failure of many previous IPCC scenarios to match reality and the tendency of the scenario groups to exaggerate near-term and long-term CO₂ concentration growth (CWG25 3.2.1). It is also a serious omission not to caution readers that many climate impact studies use RCP8.5 which by the time of NCA5 had already been heavily criticized in the literature.

The same section also reports the availability of new and larger model ensembles as a scientific advance, without addressing ways in which models are getting worse in some key respects (CWG Ch 5).

~~3.4 Uncritical Promotion of “Emergent Constraints” and uncertainty in climate projections~~

Chapter 3 page 17 presents the topic of “emergent constraints” in uncritical terms:

An approach to reduce uncertainty in climate change projections has matured over the past decade. It is known as “emergent constraints.” The term refers to strong statistical relationships between highly uncertain future climate parameters and observable trends or variations in the current climate, along with a physical explanation of this relationship.

Emergent constraints appeared in the climate modeling literature as a way to tie GCM behavior to climate observations in hopes of generating insight into real-world ECS. Climate models exhibit a wide range of sensitivities. The idea of emergent constraints is to examine whether the models with shared sensitivity values also share a common representation of some climate process (usually related to clouds) that might indirectly influence ECS. Suppose, for instance, that in low-ECS models the total cloud fraction in the tropics is strongly correlated with that in the southern midlatitudes but in high-ECS models the correlation is weak. Then researchers could check if the observed correlation is strong or weak and draw a conclusion about which type of model, and therefore which ECS value, is more likely.

A problem in the emergent constraint literature is that there has been a large proliferation of proposed correlations with little physical motivation. Many emergent constraints patterned on CMIP5 models failed to work on CMIP6 models (Schlund *et al.* 2020)⁵. In other words, the observed correlations in CMIP5 models between ECS and cloud processes failed to show up in CMIP6 models, indicating that they were likely spurious rather than clues to physical processes governing the Earth climate system. The result was that emergent constraints estimated on CMIP5 models widened the range of estimated ECS values when applied to CMIP6 models.

Schlund *et al.* summarized the problem as follows:

In this study, we systematically analyze 11 published emergent constraints on ECS that have mostly been derived from models participating in the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project Phase 5 (CMIP5) project... The focus of the study is on testing if these emergent constraints hold for [Earth System Models] participating in the new Phase 6 (CMIP6). Since none of the emergent constraints considered here have been derived using the CMIP6 ensemble, CMIP6 can be used for cross-checking of the emergent constraints on a new model ensemble. **The application of the emergent constraints to CMIP6 data shows a decrease in skill and statistical significance of the emergent relationship for nearly all constraints, with this decrease being large in many cases.** Consequently, the size of the constrained ECS ranges (66% confidence intervals) widens by 51% on average in CMIP6 compared to CMIP5.

Yet NCA5 described the use of emergent constraint analysis as a great “advance” that reduced uncertainty.

3.5 Increasing hurricane intensity

NCA5 Key message 2.2 states

Formatted: Heading 2

“Hurricanes have been intensifying more rapidly since the 1980s (*high confidence*) and causing heavier rainfall and higher storm surges (*high confidence*).”

No justification is provided in Chapter 2 for the *high confidence* conclusion on higher storm surges or hurricanes causing heavier precipitation. The Traceable Accounts section, Description of Confidence and Likelihood states:

“Basic physical understanding and climate models both provide robust explanations for the links between climate change and observed changes in these extremes: this is why the authors also have *high confidence* that storms are delivering more rainfall and high confidence that storm surges are becoming higher.”

In short, the NCA5 provides no observational basis or published research for their *high confidence* assertions that hurricanes are causing heavier rainfall and higher storm surges; and does not meet its own standards for a *high confidence level*.

⁵ Schlund, Manuel, Axel Lauer, Pierre Gentile, Steven C. Sherwood, and Veronika Eyring (2020) Emergent constraints on equilibrium climate sensitivity in CMIP5: do they hold for CMIP6? *Earth System Dynamics* 11 1233-1258 [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.5194/esd-11-1233-2020"](https://doi.org/10.5194/esd-11-1233-2020)]

3.53.6 Overstating Findings findings in Underlying-underlying Sourcesources

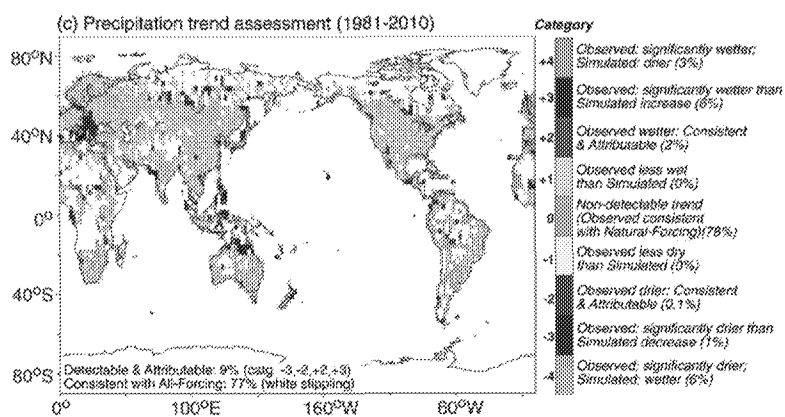
Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Although we did not do a detailed audit of the NCA5's use of source material, a few spot checks turned up evidence of a pattern of overstatement.

Chapter 2 page 11 reports on an increase in precipitation in central and eastern US based on a comparison of 2002-2021 average rainfall to the average over 1901-1960. Note that this a non-standard metric; we will discuss NCA5's inconsistent choices of time scales of analysis below. The change in this case is called a "trend" even though this is not how a trend is measured, and says that it is "attributable to climate change". The claims were attributed to the following paper:

- Knutson, Thomas and Fanrong Zeng (2018) "Model Assessment of Observed Precipitation Trends over Land Regions: Detectable Human Influences and Possible Low Bias in Model Trends" *Journal of Climate* 31(12)
-[HYPERLINK "<https://journals.ametsoc.org/view/journals/clim/31/12/jcli-d-17-0672.1.xml>"]

But Knutson and Zeng did not say these things. It examined linear trends over 1901 – 2010, 1951 – 2010 and 1981 – 2010. It did not compare average rainfall over 2002 - 2021 to average rainfall over 1901 – 1960, indeed it was published in 2018 so it could not have. With regard to 1981-2010 trends its results were summarized in the following figure:



Gray indicates no trends detected. Stippling means that there were no trends in the models either so the models and observations agreed in that respect. Detectable and attributable trends were found over only 9% of the land surface of the Earth. Over the US there are detectable trends over only a few regions in the Southwest.

Chapter 2 page 18 states

There is robust evidence that human-caused warming has contributed to increases in the frequency and severity of the heaviest precipitation events across nearly 70% of the US.

This is attributed to two papers:

- Diffenbaugh, N.S., D. Singh, and J.S. Mankin, 2018: Unprecedented climate events: Historical changes, aspirational targets, and national commitments. *Science Advances*, 4 (2), 3354. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aao3354>"]

and

- Kirchmeier-Young, M.C. and X. Zhang, 2020: Human influence has intensified extreme precipitation in North America. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 117 (24), 13308-13313. [HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1921628117>"]

Diffenbaugh et al. presented ratios of observed occurrences of extreme events to simulated occurrence rates in CMIP6 models run with only natural forcings. They report that for 79% of the U.S. extreme rainfall event frequencies are currently higher than in model simulations, and the ratio of occurrences will rise under future warming simulations. This is not "robust" evidence of anthropogenic influence since it requires readers to assume that climate models provide accurate simulations of regional precipitation patterns, something which even the IPCC AR6 admits is uncertain (AR6 WGI SPM Box SPM 1.2, SPM Section C.1.3).

Kirchmeier-Young and Zhang looked at extreme 1- and 5-day events in North America and, using 3 GCMs, found "A signal of combined anthropogenic and natural external forcing can be detected in the intensification of extreme precipitation at the continental scale over North America. In some cases, this intensification can be attributed to human influence specifically." However, they noted large differences among the three models in their simulated precipitation changes. Also, 2 of the 3 models failed to yield detection for Rx5Day for the North America mean. Finally, the authors used Total Least Squares, an estimation method known to overstate signal detection results (CWG Section 8.3.2). Here again this is not "robust" evidence, it is suggestive but other studies have found natural variability predominant. Both cited references utilized the implausible RCP8.5 scenario and began their "historical" observational records only in 1961.

4 RELIANCE ON *Ad Hoc* TIME SCALES FOR TREND ANALYSIS

In CWG25 Chapter 6 we discussed the need to be careful regarding the choice of time scale when making claims about trends in extreme weather. We gave examples from analysis of river flooding (6.1), heatwaves (6.3) and extreme precipitation (6.4) to show how assertions about apparent trends based on short data sets fall apart when looking at longer versions of the same data sets. Here we elaborate on these examples to illustrate a general point that NCA5 made inconsistent and *ad hoc* choices about time scales of analysis, weakening the validity of their conclusions.

4.1 Average and Extreme Precipitation

McKittrick and Christy (2019)⁶ showed that apparently significant positive trends in U.S. average and extreme precipitation over the NCA4 interval (1901 – 2016) disappeared on longer samples (extending back as far as the 1840s depending on location or on a shorter interval coinciding with the final 40 years of the data then available (1978 – 2017)).

In CWG Section 6.4 we presented analysis of updated data for the same locations and many more besides, in all cases finding considerable regional heterogeneity and lack of robustness of trends to use of long samples.

NCA5 did not continue the NCA4 precedent of using the post-1901 interval as the time scale for its precipitation discussion, instead it refers to changes “since the 1950s” which we take to mean 1950 onwards though NCA5 Fig. 2.8 suggests 1958 as the start date. For the present report we have extended the analysis even further now to include 141 stations across the US in the Pacific Coast, Southwest, Midwest, Northeast and Southeast regions. We provide details in the Appendix; here we note merely that once again it is possible to find trends that support the NCA5 position, but they are not robust to selecting longer or shorter time scales of analysis. Data from 1950 to 2024 yields many indications of increased average and extreme precipitation at individual stations and region-wide averages. But when using the entire data set (back to the 1890s or earlier depending on location) or the later subset (1980 to 2024) the trends become smaller, in many cases they become statistically insignificant, and occasionally they change sign. Only in the Northeast region are the post-1950 trends robust to focusing on the post-1980 interval.

Under Key Message 2.2 “Extreme Events Are Becoming More Frequent and Severe” (p. 2-16) NCA5 states (p. 2-18):

“Rainfall is becoming more extreme”

Since the 1950s, there has been an upward trend in heavy precipitation across the contiguous US. This increase is driven largely by more frequent precipitation extremes, with relatively smaller changes in their intensity. The largest increase in the number of extreme precipitation days (defined as the top 1% of heaviest precipitation events) has occurred over the Northeast (an increase of around 60%) and Midwest (around 45%), along with increases of more than 10% in their annual and 5-year maximum amount

⁶ McKittrick, R., and J.R. Christy (2019). Assessing changes in US regional precipitation on multiple time scales. *Journal of Hydrology*, 578, 124074. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhydrol.2019.124074"](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhydrol.2019.124074)]

(Figure 2.8). These changes have contributed to increases in river and stream flooding in these regions. The increase in frequency and intensity of precipitation extremes is evident across a broad range of event durations (from 1 to 30 days) and return intervals (1 to 20 years), particularly east of the Rocky Mountains.

There is robust evidence that human-caused warming has contributed to increases in the frequency and severity of the heaviest precipitation events across nearly 70% of the US. Paleoclimate records derived from tree-ring growth provide evidence that summer moisture has increased over the past century in parts of New England, the central-eastern US, and the northern Mississippi River valley.

The following is a more accurate summary of what U.S. data show.

There are regionally-heterogeneous changes in average and extreme precipitation. Positive trends in annual average rainfall and extreme events (defined either as the annual maximum or the number of exceedances of the 99th percentile value) are generally weak or non-existent when looking at samples exceeding 130 years in length. Significant trends can be found when beginning the sample in the 1950s although in most cases the trends weaken and become insignificant when looking at the post-1980 interval. This makes attribution to anthropogenic warming difficult.

Along the Pacific coast very few stations (1 or 2 out of 29) exhibit significant trends on any time scale in any metric and the region-wide trends are insignificant. In the Southeast region about 5 out of 24 stations exhibit positive trends in average and extreme precipitation metrics and the regional trends are likewise significant, but only on samples beginning in 1950. When the sample starts in 1873 or 1980 the trends weaken and become mostly insignificant. In the Midwest region nearly half the stations exhibit positive and significant trends in average precipitation since 1893 (23/61) and 1950 (28/61) but the trends weaken after 1980: only 6/61 locations are significant and the region-wide trend is insignificant. These positive trends reflect the dryness of the 1930's Dust Bowl era. Regional trends in max and 99th percentile exceedances are insignificant post-1893 and -1980 but the latter are positive and significant post-1950.

In the Northeast region 12 out of 27 stations exhibit positive and significant increases in average precipitation post-1888, post-1950 and post-1980 (10/27) and the regional trend is positive and significant in all three intervals. The regional number of 99th percentile exceedances has a positive trend post-1950 and post-1980 but not post-1888. The significant positive trends post-1980 are concentrated in NH but are insignificant elsewhere.

Consequently, precipitation in the U.S. exhibits considerable regional and temporal variability. Relatively more places became wetter than drier. In the Midwest and Northeast the general pattern since 1950 favors increased precipitation depending on the location, although trends since 1980 have not tended to be statistically significant.

4.2 Heatwaves

- details; NCA4 used entire 20th century while NCA5 looked at post-1960 interval

5 INADEQUATE TRACEABLE ACCOUNTS

- details

~~6 OVERCONFIDENCE WHEN STATING CONCLUSIONS~~

- details

~~76 RELIANCE/OVEREMPHASIS~~ ON EXTREME SCENARIOS

To respond to the GCRA mandate to "project major trends for the subsequent 25 to 100 years," the ~~NCA relies on projections of future climate change are based on~~ driven by estimates of future emissions (the so-called SSP scenarios) and/or specified levels of radiative forcing (the RCP scenarios). For the most part, NCA5 uses scenarios developed for the IPCC Assessment Reports.

~~In CWG Section 3.2.1 we presented a critical assessment of past and current IPCC scenario envelopes, showing that they have tended to overshoot observed emissions. In 2021, UN Climate Negotiators (COP) stopped using scenarios above 4.5. The IPCC AR6 published in 2021 stated that "The likelihood of high-emission scenarios like RCP8.5 and SSP5-8.5 is considered low in light of recent energy sector developments."~~

NCA5 makes the following ~~statements~~ observations about ~~future~~ the scenarios they use:

NCA5 authors were advised to assess the full range of scenarios available. (Front Matter)

Scenarios of future emissions and land-use change are developed as plausible alternatives, but no relative likelihood is attached to them. Some recent studies, however, have argued that the highest scenario, SSP5-8.5, is no longer plausible without a reversal of current trends in the adoption of renewables and energy efficiency. (Key Message 3.3 Traceable Analysis)

~~Despite acknowledging the issue, the NCA5 otherwise ignored a the problem, large body of literature (summarized in section xxx of the DOE Report) that shows the 8.5 and the 7.0 scenarios to be implausible, and advises against using them for policy-making purposes. In 2021, UN Climate Negotiators (COP) stopped using scenarios above 4.5. The IPCC AR6 published in 2021 stated that "The likelihood of high-emission scenarios like RCP8.5 and SSP5-8.5 is considered low in light of recent energy sector developments."~~

Even in the context of NCA5 being advised to assess the full range of scenarios available, a keyword search of the NCA5 of mentions of RCP/SSP scenarios finds over 50% referred to the extreme emissions scenarios RCP8.5/SSP5-8.5. Further, 10 figures only included the 8.5 scenarios: 5.2, 6.9, 7.4, 11.3, 14.6, 22.13, 22.19, 27.9, 29.13.

The problem of relying on extreme scenarios is particularly acute for sea level rise projections. The sea level rise scenarios used in the NCA5 do not relate directly to the SSP emissions scenarios, but to specified amounts of sea level rise by 2100, whereby Low relates to 0.3 m (0.98 feet), Intermediate-Low relates to 0.5 m (1.64 feet), Intermediate relates to 1.0 m (3.28 feet), Intermediate-High relates to 1.5 m (4.92 feet), and High relates to 2.0 m (6.56 feet). (Table 4 of Guide to Using this Report).

Considering only projections representing processes in whose quantification there is at least medium confidence, the IPCC AR6 assessed global mean sea level projections for 2100 to fall between 0.2 and 1.6 m (for the 5th–95th percentile range), for all scenarios ranging from RCP2.6 to RCP8.5. The IPCC AR6 cites values as high as 2.4 m at the upper end of the 95th percentile range for RCP8.5, if estimates include the hypothesized Marine Ice Cliff Instability (low confidence). The corresponding

The range of sea level rise scenarios considered by the NCA5 includes Intermediate-High (from 1.5 m) and High (to 2.0 m) values not associated with the implausible extreme emissions scenario RCP8.5 and processes in which there is low confidence in understanding. The NCA5 neglects to include plausible lower scenarios, such as 0.2 m cited by the IPCC, that which also corresponds to the average rate of sea level rise over the past century.

With regards to actual predictions of sea level rise, Chapter 9 of the NCA states: "Under a range of potential global warming levels, average sea level along US coastlines is *likely* to be between 12 and 20 inches above 2000 sea levels in 2050 (Figure 9.2)." These values of sea level rise encompass the Intermediate scenario to values slightly higher than the High scenario from Table 4 << which Table 4.2.

Global sea level rise projections to 2050 relative to a 2000 baseline can be evaluated with respect to the observed global sea level rise from 2000-2024, which is approximately 3.39 inches (0.28 feet). [HYPERLINK "https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-sea-level"] Hence it is inferred that NCA5 is projecting values of sea level rise between 2025 and 2050 that are 3.5 to 5.8 times the rate observed during 2000-2024.

Chapter 9 further states: "Looking toward the future, an 11 inch (28 cm) average rise along the contiguous US coastline is expected by 2050 (relative to 2020), with a *likely* range of 9-13 inches." This analysis accounts for the observed sea level rise between 2000 and 2020. << But they say it's relative to 2020.

Formatted: Font color: Custom Color(RGB(238,0,0))

With regards to confidence levels, NCA5 Chapter 9 Traceable Accounts states: "There is *high confidence* and it is *likely* that sea levels will rise about 11 inches (likely range of about 9–13 inches) between 2020 and 2050" Neither the statement nor the context in the paragraph ~~does not~~ distinguishes as to whether this refers to global sea level rise, or US average sea level rise, although it is inferred to refer to global sea level rise.

In summary, the NCA5 presents future sea level rise scenarios that are not directly relatable either to SSP/RCP emissions scenarios or global warming levels. The NCA5 scenarios include two scenarios that are higher than the 95th percentile for the extreme emissions scenario RCP8.5 and include hypothesized ice sheet processes for which there is low confidence. Projections to 2050 require rates of sea level rise ~~during from~~ 2025 ~~through to~~ 2050 that are more than three times the

rate observed during 2020-2024. Further, the NCA5 ascribes *high confidence* to these sea level rise projections.

The inclusion, and even the focus, on implausible extreme emissions scenarios supports projections of alarming impacts that are very unlikely to be driven by anthropogenic warming.

87 BIASED SELECTION OF REFERENCES

-details

98 SUMMARY: EVALUATING EVALUATION OF THE NCA5

9.18.1 Pertinent aspects when evaluating in light of statutory requirements

- not our remit to make a ruling but here are aspects to consider in light of statutory requirements

9.18.2 Evaluation from the perspective of expert users of the report

- we have deep knowledge of the topics surveyed by the NCA5 authors
- we do not have confidence that the report was balanced and comprehensive
- we can point to many specific instances in which the report did not exhibit an appropriate level of quality or integrity as a scientific document
- we have reason to believe the whole process, from author selection to handling of expert reviews, was biased towards reinforcing foregone conclusions and alarmist messaging

9.18.3 Evaluation from the perspective of citizens interested in good policymaking

- Public concerns about climate change are valid, as are concerns about cost of living, economic growth, employment, etc.
- We share the general concern that elected officials and those who serve them have the best information available when making important decisions around energy and climate policy
- NCA5 was a missed opportunity: it could have been a valuable input to that process but it did not turn out that way
- consequently its usage is unlikely to lead to better decisions and would more likely increase the error rate in policy formation and we recommend it not be used for policymaking purposes.

APPENDIX 1: Seth's letter on statutory requirements for NCA5

APPENDIX 2: Analysis of 141 U.S. Longterm Daily Precipitation Records.

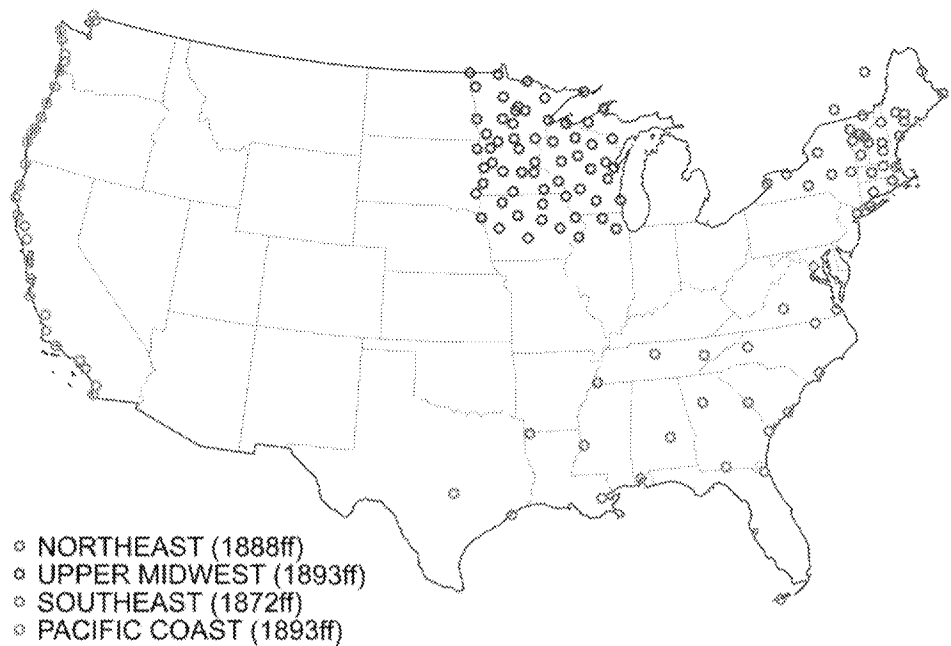


Figure. Stations used in the following analyses.

Table codes: (-) neg insignificant, -- neg significant, (+) pos insignificant, ++ pos significant.

Column 1: Measure
Column 2: Number of stations in that region
Column 3: Count of stations exhibiting a significant positive trend
Column 3: Count of stations exhibiting a significant negative trend
Column 5: Characteristic of region-wide trend

PACIFIC COAST

Since 1893:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	29	0	1	(-)
2-day average	29	0	1	(-)
Avg on non-zero days	29	0	9	--
Variability	29	1	0	(+)
Annual max	29	2	1	(+)

Number of 99 th pct exceedances	29	1	0	(-)
--	----	---	---	-----

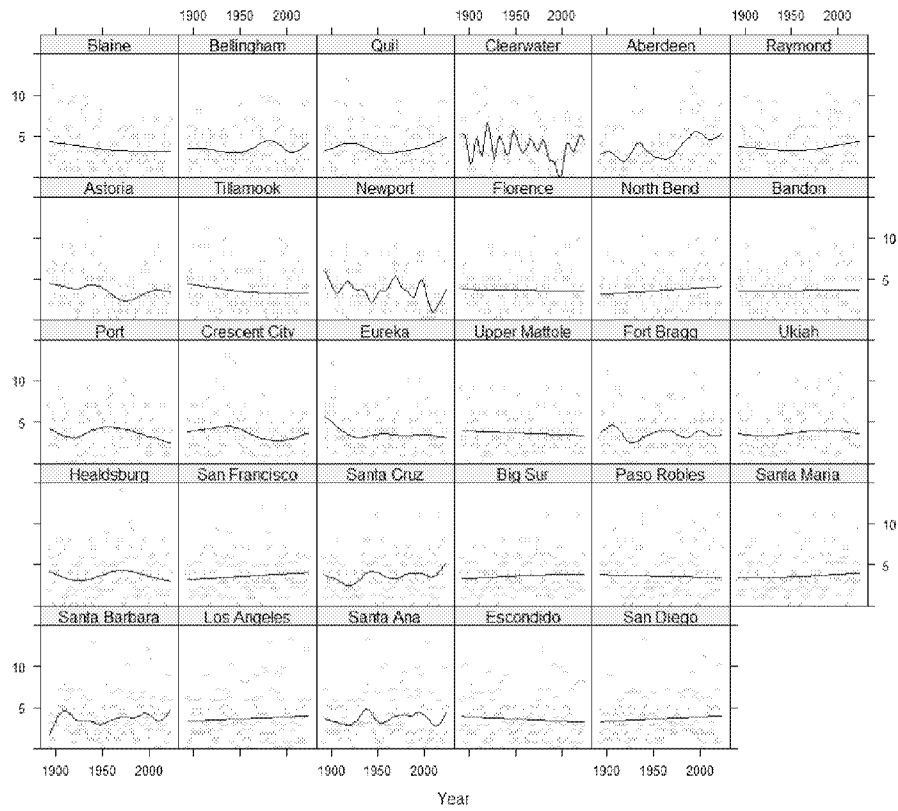
Since 1950:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	29	0	1	(-)
2-day average	29	0	1	(-)
Avg on non-zero days	29	0	4	(-)
Variability	29	2	3	(-)
Annual max	29	6	3	(-)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	29	2	1	(-)

Since 1980:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	29	0	0	(-)
2-day average	29	0	0	(-)
Avg on non-zero days	29	0	1	(-)
Variability	29	0	0	(-)
Annual max	29	2	1	(-)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	29	0	0	(+)

Annual No. 99th Percentile Exceedances PC 1893-2024



SOUTHEAST

Since 1873:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	24	1	1	(+)
2-day average	24	1	1	(+)
Avg on non-zero days	24	7	2	(+)
Variability	24	1	0	(+)
Annual max	24	2	0	(+)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	24	5	0	(+)

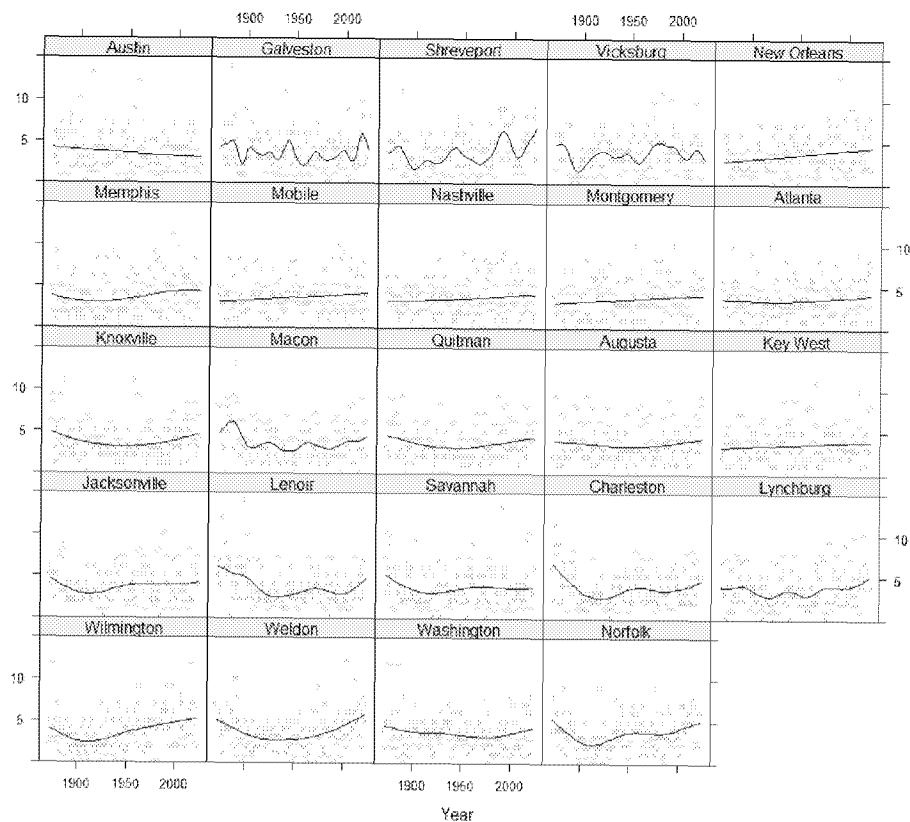
Since 1950:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	24	5	0	++
2-day average	24	5	0	++
Avg on non-zero days	24	5	1	++
Variability	24	6	0	++
Annual max	24	4	0	++
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	24	4	0	(+)

Since 1980:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	24	5	0	(+)
2-day average	24	5	0	(+)
Avg on non-zero days	24	5	1	(+)
Variability	24	3	0	(+)
Annual max	24	4	0	(+)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	24	4	0	(+)

Annual No. 99th Percentile Exceedances SE 1873-2024



MIDWEST

Since 1893:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	61	23	0	++
2-day average	61	23	0	++
Avg on non-zero days	61	2	12	(+)
Variability	61	12	0	++
Annual max	61	9	0	(+)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	61	10	0	(+)

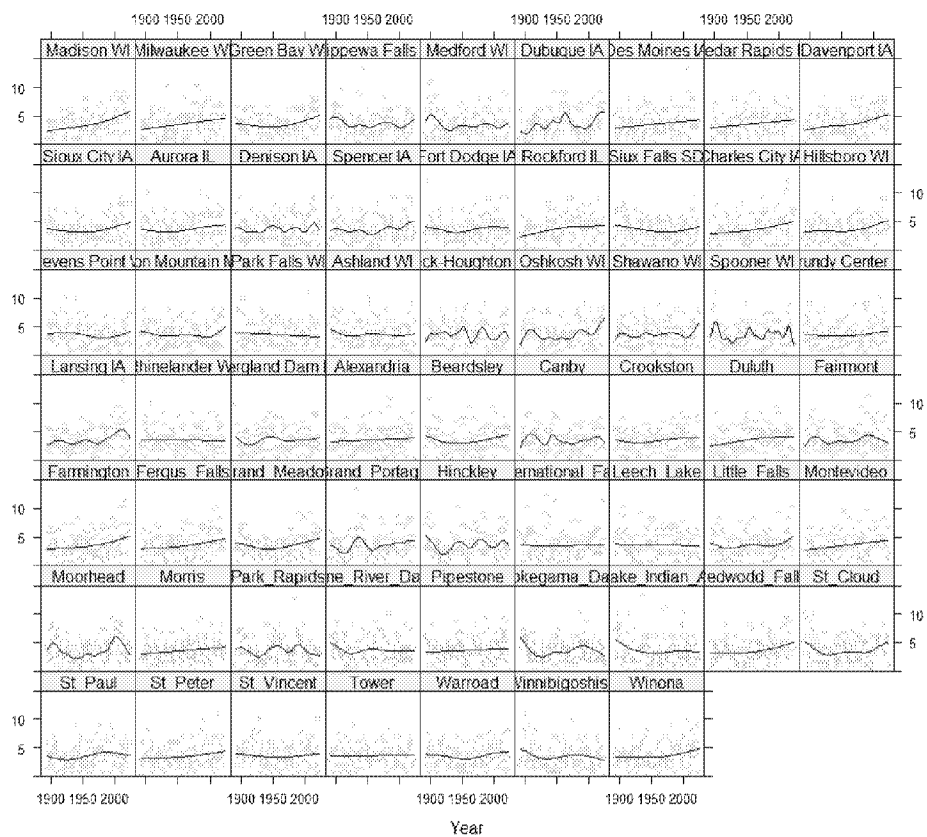
Since 1950:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	61	28	2	++
2-day average	61	28	2	++
Avg on non-zero days	61	11	1	++
Variability	61	16	0	(+)
Annual max	61	8	0	(+)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	61	19	0	++

Since 1980:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	61	6	1	(+)
2-day average	61	6	1	(+)
Avg on non-zero days	61	8	2	(+)
Variability	61	5	1	(+)
Annual max	61	0	1	(+)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	61	5	3	(-)

Annual No. 99th Percentile Exceedances MW 1893-2024



NORTHEAST

Since 1888:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	27	12	0	++
2-day average	27	12	0	++
Avg on non-zero days	27	7	1	(+)
Variability	27	4	0	(+)
Annual max	27	3	0	(-)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	27	5	0	(+)

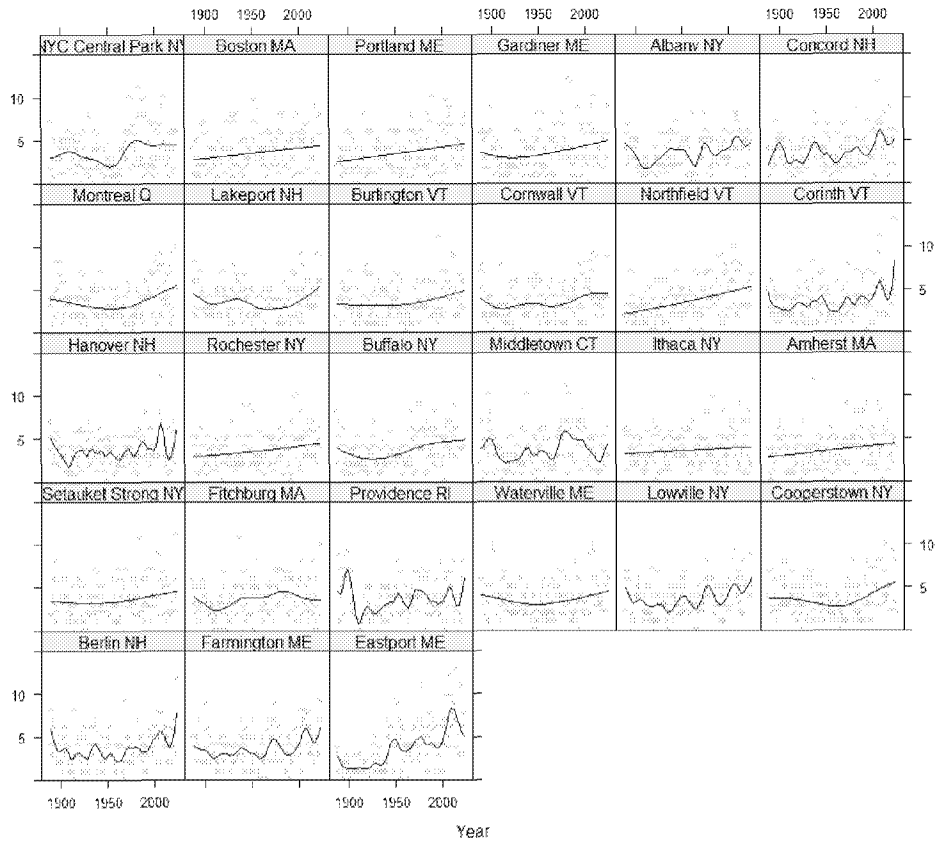
Since 1950:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	27	12	0	++
2-day average	27	12	0	++
Avg on non-zero days	27	7	1	(+)
Variability	27	4	0	(+)
Annual max	27	3	0	(-)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	27	5	0	++

Since 1980:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	27	10	1	++
2-day average	27	10	1	++
Avg on non-zero days	27	6	0	(+)
Variability	27	2	0	(+)
Annual max	27	1	0	(+)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	27	1	1	++

Annual No. 99th Percentile Exceedances NE 1888-2024



Review of the Fifth National Climate Assessment

[TOC \o "1-3" \h \z \u]

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report critically evaluates the Fifth National Climate Assessment (NCA5), finding it an inadequate basis for climate and energy policies. A detailed review of the foundational chapters on climate science raises several key concerns:

Scientific Integrity

- An advocacy tone, particularly in the Overview chapter, inconsistent with scientific objectivity
- An endemic overconfidence when stating conclusions, including inflated certainty levels and overstatement of findings from underlying sources

Flawed methodology

- Use of *ad hoc* time scales for trend analyses in areas such as precipitation and heatwaves
- An overemphasis on extreme scenarios for future emissions
- Inadequate traceable accounts to support key conclusions

Deficient Review Process

- A review by the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) failed to challenge some fundamental flaws in NCA5
- The NCA5 authors failed to adopt some improvements recommended by NASEM

The report shows NCA5 to be a biased and incomplete picture of climate science that skews toward excessive climate risk. Consequently, NCA5 should not be used as basis for climate and energy policies.

Top of Form

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 About this Report

This report responds to a request from OSTP Director Michael Kratsios (reproduced in Appendix 1) that we assess the suitability of the Fifth National Climate Assessment (NCA5 2023) for informing climate and energy policies.

To conduct this assessment we reviewed NCA5 itself, the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) review of the Third Order Draft, and the USGCRP responses to that review. We have drawn upon our long experience working on advisory reports, including for the NASEM, the IPCC-Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other organizations, as writers, reviewers and study leaders.

We find that NCA5 should not be relied on for policy making as it is an incomplete and misleading picture of our understanding of the changing climate and the risks it poses to the nation. NCA5 was selective and incomplete in its survey of climate science as of its publication in 2023 and has become even more so in the years since. We have reviewed many key scientific developments in a separate report to Energy Secretary Wright (Climate Working Group 2025, herein denoted "CWG25"). The overall effect of the biases and omissions of NCA5 is an excessively dire picture of climate risk.

To support our finding, the following sections of this chapter provide some background on the National Climate Assessments and the standards by which we have assessed NCA5. Chapters 2 through 6 detail important ways in which NCA5 fails to meet those standards. Chapter 7 then follows with an assessment of the NASEM review. Finally, Chapter 8 summarizes our evaluation of NCA5.

1.2 About the National Climate Assessments

The [HYPERLINK "https://www.globalchange.gov/"] (USGCRP) was established by Presidential Initiative in 1989 and mandated by Congress in the Global Change Research Act (GCRA) of 1990 to develop and coordinate "a comprehensive and integrated United States research program which will assist the Nation and the world to understand, assess, predict, and respond to human-induced and natural processes of global change."

The National Climate Assessment (NCA) Reports evolved from the GCRA requirement to

Prepare and submit to the President and the Congress an assessment which (1) integrates, evaluates, and interprets the findings of the Program and discusses the scientific uncertainties associated with such findings; (2) analyzes the effects of global change on the natural environment, agriculture, energy production and use, land and water resources, transportation, human health and welfare, human social systems, and biological diversity; and (3) analyzes current trends in global change, both human-induced and natural, and projects major trends for the subsequent 25 to 100 years.

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0", Hanging: 0.5"

The five NCA Reports to date have interpreted this mandate in different ways:

- NCA1 (2000) was a multidisciplinary effort to study and portray in regional detail the potential effects of human-induced global warming on the United States.
- NCA2 (2009) was a relatively short report that not only focused on the potential consequences of climate change but also sought to identify potential adaptation measures and identify the highest priorities for future research.

- NCA3 (2014) was an expanded effort that continued along the lines of NCA2, and was distinguished by a comprehensive review process, including a review by the National Academy of Sciences. NCA3 introduced a traceability analysis for each key finding, including a description of uncertainties.
- NCA4 (2017/2018) was a further expanded effort published in two volumes: I Climate Science Special Report, and II Impacts, Risk, and Adaptation in the United States. This was the first NCA report to devote significant effort to assessing climate science.
- NCA5 (2023) returned to a single volume format, reducing discussion of climate science to a cursory two chapters, with continuing with a focus on regional and sectoral impacts of climate change. NCA5 expanded its remit to topics that are arguably outside the purview of the USGCRP, focusing on "Climate Action" and policy recommendations with a social justice emphasis. NCA5's self-description is reproduced as Appendix II.

These successive interpretations of the NCA are poorly aligned with the GCRA's statutory requirements. Only NCA4 gives serious consideration to climate science, which receives the great majority of USGCRP funding, and even then misrepresents some important points (Section 1.4 below offers an example). Natural climate variability is essentially dismissed as unimportant in NCA4 and barely mentioned in NCA5 in most contexts, despite the mandate to include both human-caused and natural climate change. Most significantly, NCA5 has redirected the focus away from climate science and even the hazard elements of impacts, towards evaluation of societal vulnerabilities and advocacy for particular policy options, especially wind and solar power. The cover image for the NCA5 Report is the installation of a solar panel.

1.3 Standards for Assessing NCA Products

~~In Appendix 2 we include a letter of guidance from the Office of General Counsel, U.S. Department of Energy, summarizing the statutory requirements governing USGCRP work products in general and NCA products in particular.~~

~~We can summarize the standards applicable to the NCA as follows:
—details—~~

Beyond the statutory requirements stated above, we draw attention to two other pertinent standards. President Trump's executive order of May 23, 2025, "[[HYPERLINK "https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/05/restoring-gold-standard-science/"](https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/05/restoring-gold-standard-science/)]" enumerates some of the characteristics of good science:

- i. reproducible;
- ii. transparent;
- iii. communicative of error and uncertainty;
- iv. collaborative and interdisciplinary;
- v. skeptical of its findings and assumptions;
- vi. structured for falsifiability of hypotheses;
- vii. subject to unbiased peer review;
- viii. accepting of negative results as positive outcomes; and
- ix. without conflicts of interest.

Although these should be self-evident to those trained in science, it is surprising that some scientists have found them controversial (Dellawalla et al. 2025).

There are other desiderata for scientific reports that will be highly influential on climate policymaking. Among them are statements about the strength of climate knowledge. The IPCC's approach is based on judgment of the available evidence and agreement among experts. More sophisticated knowledge characterizations for risk management include (Arven 2017):

- The degree to which the assumptions made are reasonable/realistic based on background knowledge
- The degree to which data/information exists and are reliable and relevant
- The degree to which there is disagreement among experts (including those from different environments or academic fields)
- The degree to which the phenomena involved are understood and accurate models exist
- The degree to which the knowledge has been thoroughly examined with respect to unknown knowns

Good climate and energy policies balance the risks and benefits of a changing climate against the world's growing demand for reliable and affordable energy. To strike that balance, policymakers must understand at least two complex and nuanced topics: the certainties and uncertainties of climate science and the technoeconomic realities of energy systems. Experts in those subjects have a responsibility to communicate their understanding to non-experts clearly, completely, and without bias.

Expertise in energy systems resides largely in the private sector, where it is essential to providing the reliable and affordable energy services that are the lifeblood of society. Understanding is therefore continually refined and tested by the discipline of the marketplace. In contrast, climate science expertise is found largely in the non-profit realm of universities and government laboratories and so has a more academic character.

In recent decades, climate science has engendered passion and emotion. Indeed, some younger climate scientists have gone into the field to "save the planet." Further, the field of climate science has been politicized by NetZero mandates. It is then not surprising that objectivity can suffer when climate scientists communicate their understanding to non-experts. This lack of objectivity usurps the public's right to make informed choices and undermines their confidence in the scientific enterprise.

In 1980, then-President of the National Academy of Sciences Philip Handler identified the problem in an editorial (Handler 1980) that resonates eerily four decades later:

Difficulty arises in the scientific community from confusion of the role of scientist *qua* scientist with that of scientist as citizen, confusion of the ethical code of the scientist with the obligation of the citizen, blurring the distinction between intrinsically scientific and intrinsically political questions. When scientists fail to recognize these boundaries, their own ideological beliefs, usually unspoken, easily becloud seemingly scientific debate.

1.4 When Peer Review Fails

Peer review of reports like IPCC and NCA products is not a silver bullet that guarantees quality. The peer review process for these reports differs in some important respects from traditional peer review in academic journals. First, during the open review phases of early NCA drafts reviewers are volunteers who self-select what parts of the report to read, whereas the editors of academic journals editors recruit reviewers with relevant expertise and assign them to specific papers. As a result, there is no guarantee at that stage that any particular section of an NCA report was reviewed by anyone, ~~WHAT ABOUT THE NASEM REVIEW?~~ let alone by someone with a perspective that differs from the authors. In fact, many potential reviewers have given up over the years because their input has systematically been ignored. The introduction of a NASEM review stage is at best a partial remedy for this. However, Second, NCA authors have near complete authority whether to accept or reject review comments. By contrast, the Editor of an academic journal mandates the author to respond, respond, and the reviewer and Editor assess its adequacy. And third, Finally, the work of an NCA chapter author team is guaranteed to be published, whereas academic journals routinely reject papers that do not pass review.

Formatted: Not Highlight

Formatted: Not Highlight

Formatted: Font color: Auto

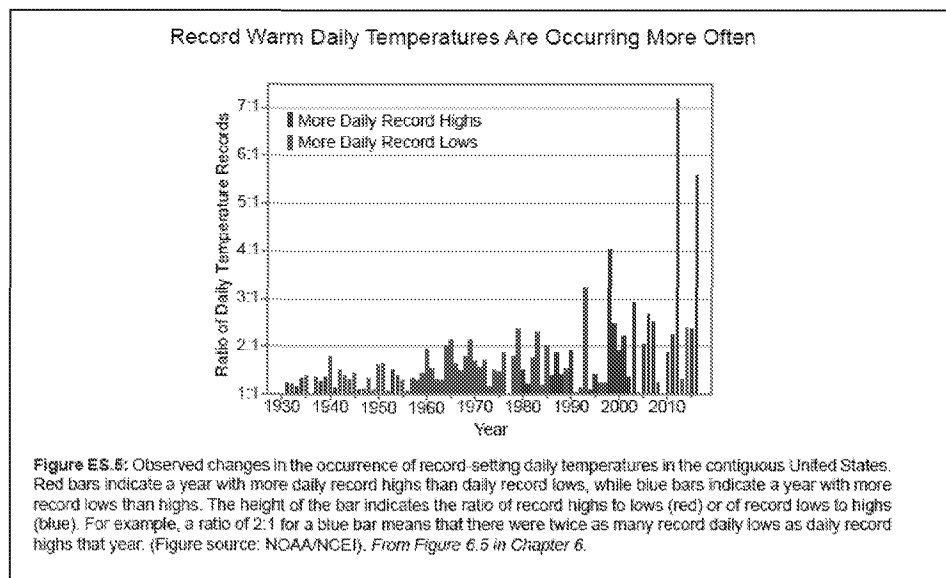
Formatted: Font color: Auto

These points are important to bear in mind because some readers might dismiss any criticism of NCA products out of hand on the grounds that they were "peer reviewed". But the test of a report is whether its contents are a valid representation of the available evidence. Here we give an example in which NCA4 gave prominence to a figure that completely misrepresented the underlying data and which evaded peer review to do so. Further details can be found in Koonin (2024).

As shown in CWG25 Section 6.3 the number of heat extremes in the U.S. peaked in the 1930s and has declined ever since. Considering cold and hot extremes together the U.S. the U.S. climate has become more moderate over time. NCA4's Part I ~~{[HYPERLINK "https://science2017.globalchange.gov/"]}~~, CCSP) says (prominently and with *Very High Confidence*) on Page 19 of the Executive Summary:

There have been marked changes in temperature extremes across the contiguous United States. The number of high temperature records set in the past two decades far exceeds the number of low temperature records.

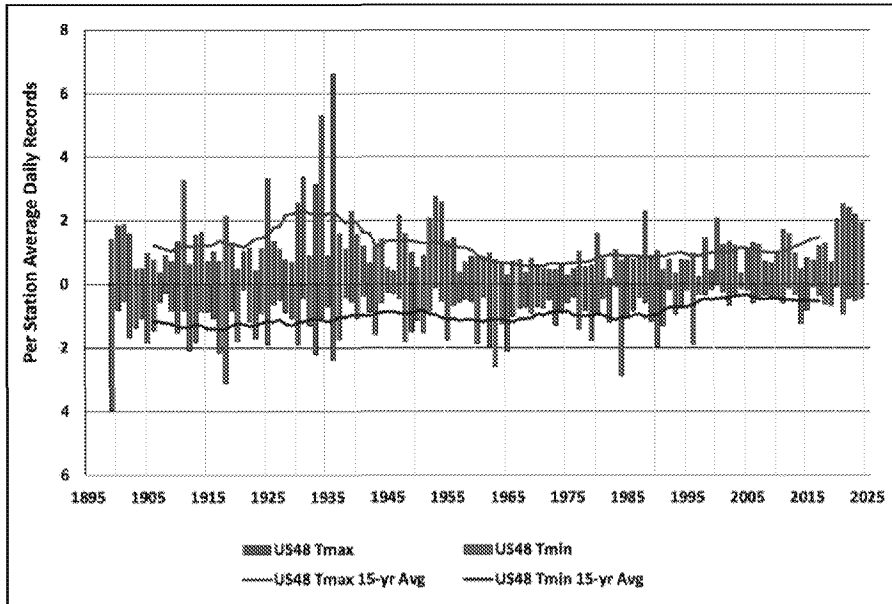
and offers this figure in support:



The figure appears to validate the claim that record warm daily temperatures are occurring more often. But the underlying data do not. Rather, they show that extreme heat in the U.S. peaked in the 1920s and 1930s and declined thereafter, as supported by Figure 6.4 deep within the CSSR itself (reproduced in our Section 4.2 below).

Figure ES.5 does not even show what its title implies, as it displays not simple counts of cold and warm extreme events, but rather ratios of the two counts. In fact, both types of extremes declined over the sample interval, but cold events declined more than warm events, so the ratio of warm extremes to cold extremes increased. By graphing the ratio instead of counts, NCA4 creates a visual impression opposite to what is in the data.

Figure 6.3.3 of CWG25 (reproduced below) shows the results of a proper analysis of the data – defining each record as the singular extreme in the sample interval, displaying numbers of warm and cold records separately, and beginning the analysis in 1899 rather than 1930. It makes evident the exceptional heat of the 1920s and especially the 1930s, peaking in 1936. The increased heat of the past five years is too brief to be deemed climatically significant and, in any event, occurred after the CSSR was published in 2017. The frequency of cold records has declined, especially over the last quarter of the period in which only 13 percent of the extreme cold events were measured. In contrast, 25 percent of the heat records were achieved in the last quarter, which is consistent with statistical expectations. As a result, the ratio of heat to cold extremes shown in Figure ES.5 of the CSSR explodes in recent decades. The overall reduction in numbers of both cold and hot extremes over the past century indicates a climate *less* prone to extremes, in sharp contrast to the message of NCA4 Figure ES.5.



Number of daily record High (red) and Low (blue) temperatures for warm and cold seasons in the CONUS. The lines represent the 15-year running, centered average. Source: 1,211 USHCN stations supplemented as needed to achieve a minimum of 92 percent of observations in the 126-year period since Dec 1898. US48: contiguous U.S. states. Tmax: maximum temperature. Tmin: minimum temperature. Source: CWG25 Figure 6.3.3.

The National Academies' expert review panel [[HYPERLINK "https://www.nap.edu/catalog/24712/review-of-the-draft-climate-science-special-report"](https://www.nap.edu/catalog/24712/review-of-the-draft-climate-science-special-report)] the discussion of temperature extremes in a [[HYPERLINK "https://biotech.law.lsu.edu/blog/Draft-of-the-Climate-Science-Special-Report.pdf"](https://biotech.law.lsu.edu/blog/Draft-of-the-Climate-Science-Special-Report.pdf)] of the CSSR. In reference to the CSSR's Key Finding 2 of Chapter 6, they said:

Further, it is difficult to understand how a statement that includes increases in extreme warmth can be associated with a high confidence or extremely likely statement, given that most of the graphics in this chapter show a decrease in extreme warmth in the historical record.

Formatted: Right: 0"

The Federal official in charge of the CSSR (Michael Kuperberg, Executive Director of the USGCRP) [[HYPERLINK "https://science2017.globalchange.gov/PDFs/CSSR-NASresponse_110217.pdf"](https://science2017.globalchange.gov/PDFs/CSSR-NASresponse_110217.pdf)] to the Academies' review by noting that

Almost every recommendation from the NAS was incorporated [in the final version]...and a new figure was added on changes in record high and low temperatures

Formatted: Right: 0"

The “new figure” referred to is the Figure ES.5, which did not appear in the draft reviewed by the Academies’ panel. It seems unlikely that the Academies panel ever saw that figure because they surely would have commented if they had and it wouldn’t have survived to publication. And the figure’s problems were evidently not flagged (or were ignored) in the subsequent internal government reviews.

With this background we now present our critique of NCA5.

Formatted: Left, Space After: 12 pt, Line spacing: Double, Tab stops: Not at 0.5"

2 NCA5 OVERVIEW CHAPTER: HYPERBOLIC ADVOCACY LANGUAGE AND UNSCIENTIFIC TONE

NCA5 Chapter 1, "Overview", holds a prominent place in the Report since it summarizes the entire report and is the only section that many will read. Although the later chapters of NCA5 contain much sound scholarly content, Chapter 1 is marred by an activist tone and language that aggressively promotes mitigation policies. As such, this chapter adds an imprimatur of scientific authority to oversimplified declarations of opinion about public policy. Many examples can be cited; here we note a few that are particularly egregious.

Formatted: Font color: Auto

Chapter 1 opens as follows:

The more the planet warms, the greater the impacts. Without rapid and deep reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions from human activities, the risks of accelerating sea level rise, intensifying extreme weather, and other harmful climate impacts will continue to grow. Each additional increment of warming is expected to lead to more damage and greater economic losses compared to previous increments of warming, while the risk of catastrophic or unforeseen consequences also increases.

This statement presupposes that all warming is anthropogenic, that all warming is bad and causes economic damage, and that warming intensifies extreme weather. Such sweeping generalizations go well beyond what science has or can establish. The statement also refers to growing risks without saying whether they were large to begin with-- a small risk that grows may still be a small risk, and a large risk may be only incrementally worsened. A scientifically-sound version of this paragraph would instead say something like the following:

Formatted: Font color: Auto

The Earth is warming because of a combination of natural and anthropogenic influences. This warming will generate a mix of benefits and harms that varies by region, to which society should be prepared to adapt. Some types of extreme weather have worsened recently, while others have not changed or have even declined in intensity. Reducing emissions of greenhouse gases might slow the warming although such policies have proven to be costly and disruptive, so any climate actions to be weighed against the potential benefits.

On the next page the Overview states:

Formatted: Font color: Auto

Each additional increment of warming leads to greater risks [here it lists 7 key components of society including food security and the economy]... Without deeper cuts in global net emissions, climate risks to the US will continue to grow... Action to limit future warming and reduce risks can have near-term benefits and opportunities: low-carbon energy jobs, Improved air quality, Health benefits, Economic benefits..."

The authors write as if climate policy does not involve trade-offs and all measures to reduce future warming will be effective and beneficial. But the vast body of scholarship on climate science and economics does not support such simplistic claims. Not every additional increment of warming leads to economic harms; in fact, NCA5 Chapter 19 acknowledges that there will also be benefits. Nor is

climate policy guaranteed to create jobs or benefit the economy; in many cases it has done the opposite. Such deceit is a disservice to policymakers.

Pages 8 and 9 of the Overview promote renewable energy options by noting, correctly, that the leveled costs of wind/solar generation have fallen sharply since 2010, and so offers this rationale for pursuing deep emission reductions:

Recent growth in the capacities of wind, solar, and battery storage technologies is supported by rapidly falling costs of zero- and low-carbon energy technologies, which can support even deeper emissions reductions. For example, wind and solar energy costs dropped 70% and 90%, respectively, over the last decade, while 80% of new generation capacity in 2020 came from renewable sources.

Yet it has long been known that intermittent renewables generation must be supplemented by dispatchable generation to meet grid reliability standards, and that doing so (e.g., through natural gas, fission, or storage) significantly increases the cost of electricity. Further, there are yet unmet synchronization challenges in transmission grids with heavy penetration of wind and solar power. Here again it is advisory malpractice not to acknowledge these facts.

Page 14 of the Overview presents future emission scenarios with the following description: "Climate modeling experts develop global climate projections for a range of plausible futures." The word "plausible" is applied to all of the scenarios. The accompanying Figure includes both SSP3-7.0 and SSP5-8.5, the latter reaching the same radiative forcing as RCP8.5. The Figure does not compare observed emissions with previous projections nor does it caution readers that SSP3-7.0 and SSP5-8.5 are extreme worst case scenarios that, like RCP8.5, have been heavily criticized in the scientific literature (CWG25 3.2.1). By describing the entire envelope of emission projections as "plausible" the report opens the door to later presenting impacts associated with extreme and implausible emission scenarios as part of a baseline "business-as-usual" future.

Formatted: Font color: Auto

Formatted: Font color: Auto

Page 17 of the Overview introduces the discussion of risks from extreme weather events by saying "Harmful impacts from more frequent and severe extremes are increasing across the country." This creates the impression that disaster losses are driven by trends in extreme weather. While the section goes on to acknowledge that some of the increase is due to increases in the value of assets at risk it then invokes the NOAA Billion Dollar Dataset as evidence of extreme weather getting worse. Scientists have shown that this is an invalid metric (CWG 10.2) since it measures the growth of the economy not the frequency of extreme weather, and indeed NOAA has recently withdrawn the data product (Pielke Jr. 2024, 2025). Even though it was still distributed by NOAA at the time of the NCA5, the report authors should have assessed it skeptically and seen that it was unfit for the purpose of measuring climate trends.

Page 23 of the Overview states, in large font:

Climate changes are making it harder to maintain safe homes and healthy families; reliable public services; a sustainable economy; thriving ecosystems, cultures, and traditions; and strong communities.

It is pointless to try to evaluate this statement on scholarly grounds; it is self-evidently hyperbolic. This kind of language doesn't belong in a scientific assessment report. Its prominent inclusion points not only to the willingness of NCA5 authors to promote alarm, but also the ineffectiveness of the review process in not ensuring such statements are removed.

3 OVERCONFIDENCE WHEN STATING CONCLUSIONS

Formatted: Heading 1

3.1.1 Inflated certainty levels

Overconfidence in stating conclusions is an endemic problem in NCA5. The authors frequently make sweeping generalizations without appropriate caveats or acknowledging uncertainties. The overconfidence begins with inflated language to describe certainty levels.

NCA5 uses specific terms to convey information about scientific confidence associated with important finds, observations and projections. The Front Matter of NCA5 states that

confidence in a finding is based on the type, amount, quality, strength, and consistency of evidence; the skill, range, and consistency of methods to detect, evaluate, attribute, and interpret climate trends; and the degree of agreement across scientific information sources.

and Table 1 from the Front Matter provides calibrated language for confidence assessment:

Very high:	Strong evidence (established theory, multiple sources, well documented and accepted methods, etc.). High consensus
High:	Moderate evidence (several sources, some consistency, methods vary and/or documentation limited, etc.). Medium consensus
Medium:	Suggestive evidence (a few sources, limited consistency, methods emerging, etc.) Competing schools of thought.
Low:	Inconclusive evidence (limited sources, extrapolations, inconsistent findings, poor documentation and/or methods not tested, etc.). Disagreement or lack of opinions among experts.

This terminology is inflated: *high confidence* with just moderate evidence and medium consensus; *medium confidence* with only suggestive evidence and competing schools of thought. This inflation in terminology leads to overconfidence in conclusions.

Even with this inflated terminology, NCA5 further inflates the confidence level of many of its conclusions to well beyond what the IPCC has concluded with more thorough justification, and also by incorrectly applying its own standards. The following example is the conclusion about anthropogenic influence on climate change, arguably one of the most important scientific statements of the report.

Formatted: Not Highlight

Key Message 3.1 Traceable Account states:

There is *very high confidence* that emissions of GHGs from human activities, fossil fuel use in particular, have unequivocally caused *all* global warming observed over the industrial era.

while the corresponding statements from IPCC AR5 and AR6 are

AR5: It is *extremely likely* that *more than half* of the observed increase in global average surface temperature from 1951 to 2010 was caused by the anthropogenic increase in greenhouse gas concentrations and other anthropogenic forcings together." (IPCC, 2013)

AR6: The *likely* range of total human-caused global surface temperature increase from 1850–1900 to 2010–2019 is 0.8°C to 1.3°C, with a best estimate of 1.07°C. It is *likely* that well-mixed

GHGs contributed a warming of 1.0°C to 2.0°C, other human drivers (principally aerosols) contributed a cooling of 0.0°C to 0.8°C, natural drivers changed global surface temperature by -0.1°C to +0.1°C, and internal variability changed it by -0.2°C to +0.2°C. It is *very likely* that well-mixed GHGs were the main driver of tropospheric warming since 1979.

The IPCC AR5 and AR6 statements provide likelihood assessments but not a confidence level. While NCA5 claims with *very high confidence* that fossil fuels have unequivocally caused *all* global warming, AR5 refers to "*more than half of the observed warming*" and AR6 provides a more nuanced statement that relates to a *likely* range of warming contributed to by human drivers.

~~Quite separately we note that the attribution of various changes to "climate change" is misleadingly ambiguous. Because NCA5's Glossary defines "climate change" as a change in climate for any reason, the statement is a tautology and so the attribution is superfluous. But because the popular perception of climate change is anthropogenic, its gratuitous inclusion effectively attributes the changes to greenhouse gas emissions.~~

Formatted: Highlight

2.3.2 Overstating findings in underlying sources

Although we did not do a detailed audit of NCA5's use of source material, spot checks turned up evidence of a pattern of overstatement.

Chapter 2 page 11 reports on an increase in precipitation in some areas and attributes it to "human caused climate change":

Formatted: Font color: Auto

Many eastern regions of the country are getting wetter (Figure 2.4). Average annual precipitation from 2002-2021 was 5%-15% higher relative to the 1901-1960 average in the central and eastern US, a trend attributable to climate change.

~~Note that the attribution of various changes to "climate change" is misleadingly ambiguous. Because NCA5's Glossary defines "climate change" as a change in climate for any reason, the statement is a tautology and so the attribution is superfluous. But because the popular perception of climate change is anthropogenic, its gratuitous inclusion effectively attributes the changes to greenhouse gas emissions. The NASEM review (pp. 23-24) commented on this problem but their comment was ignored.~~

Formatted: Not Highlight

Formatted: Not Highlight

Formatted: Not Highlight

Formatted: Not Highlight

~~Note that this change metric in NCA5 Figure 2.4 is a non-standard metric; we will discuss NCA5's inconsistent choices of time scales of analysis below. The claims were attributed to the following paper: Knutson and Zeng (2018).~~

- ~~• Knutson, Thomas and Fanrong Zeng (2018) "Model Assessment of Observed Precipitation Trends over Land Regions: Detectable Human Influences and Possible Low Bias in Model Trends" *Journal of Climate* 31(12) [HYPERLINK "https://journals.ametsoc.org/view/journals/clim/31/12/jcli-d-17-0672.1.xml"]~~

But Knutson and Zeng did not say these things. They examined linear trends over 1901 - 2010, 1951 - 2010 and 1981 - 2010. They did not compare average rainfall over 2002 - 2021 to average rainfall over 1901 - 1960, if only because their study was published in 2018. For 1981-2010, they noted stronger trends in some areas but cautioned that such changes are consistent with natural variability, and they did not claim attributable trends were observed over the United States:

Observed annual precipitation trends over the recent 30-yr period 1981–2010 ([HYPERLINK "https://journals.ametsoc.org/view/journals/clim/31/12/jcli-d-17-0672.1.xml" \l "fig5"]) have generally stronger magnitudes (in mm yr⁻¹ decade⁻¹) than observed trends for 1901–2010 or 1951–2010. This is as expected since trends over a shorter period have stronger potential for occurrence of pronounced temporary trends due to internal variability alone. Only 9% of the analyzed area has detectable and attributable anthropogenic influence (categories -3, -2, +2, +3), which represents less than one-third of the fractional areal coverage of such trends for 1901–2010 (29%). ... Eight percent of the analyzed area has attributable anthropogenic *increases* (categories +2, +3), including parts of eastern Europe, northern Asia, northern Australia/Maritime Continent, and tropical Africa.

As another example of overstating findings, NCA5's Chapter 2 page 18 states

There is robust evidence that human-caused warming has contributed to increases in the frequency and severity of the heaviest precipitation events across nearly 70% of the US.

This is allegedly attributed to two papers *Diffenbaugh et al. (2018)* and *Kirchmeier-Young and Zhang (2020)*.²

Formatted: Font: Italic

- ~~Diffenbaugh, N.S., D. Singh, and J.S. Mankin, 2018: Unprecedented climate events: Historical changes, aspirational targets, and national commitments. *Science Advances*, 4 (2), 3354. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aao3354"]~~
- ~~Kirchmeier-Young, M.C. and X. Zhang, 2020: Human influence has intensified extreme precipitation in North America. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 117 (24), 13308–13313. [HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1921628117"]~~

Diffenbaugh *et al.* presented ratios of observed occurrences of extreme events to simulated occurrence rates in CMIP6 models run with only natural forcings. They report that for 79% of the U.S. extreme rainfall event frequencies are currently higher than in model simulations, and the ratio of occurrences will rise under future warming simulations. This is not "robust" evidence of anthropogenic influence since it requires readers to assume that climate models provide accurate simulations of regional precipitation patterns, something that even IPCC AR6 admits is uncertain (AR6 WGI SPM Box SPM 1.2, SPM Section C.1.3).

Kirchmeier-Young and Zhang looked at extreme 1- and 5-day events in North America and, using three GCMs, found

A signal of combined anthropogenic and natural external forcing can be detected in the intensification of extreme precipitation at the continental scale over North America. In some cases, this intensification can be attributed to human influence specifically.

However, they noted large differences among the three models in their simulated precipitation changes. Also, two of the three models failed to yield attribution for 5-day events for the North America mean. In other words the models disagreed on whether the observed changes were due to anthropogenic activity. Both cited references utilized the implausible RCP8.5 scenario and began

their “historical” observational records only in 1961. Here again this is not “robust” evidence, it is merely suggestive, particularly since other studies have found natural variability predominant.

2.3.3 Technical example: Emergent constraints

Some of the overconfidence expressed by NCA5 arises by omitting discussion of counterevidence in the peer reviewed literature. An example is the topic of “emergent constraints”. Chapter 3 page 17 invokes this concept to support its claim that key uncertainties have been reduced:

An approach to reduce uncertainty in climate change projections has matured over the past decade. It is known as “emergent constraints.” The term refers to strong statistical relationships between highly uncertain future climate parameters and observable trends or variations in the current climate, along with a physical explanation of this relationship.

Emergent constraints appeared in the climate modeling literature as an attempt to tie GCM behavior to climate observations in hopes of generating insight into real-world equilibrium climate sensitivity to a doubling of carbon dioxide (ECS). Climate models exhibit a wide range of ECS values. The idea of emergent constraints is to examine whether the models with shared sensitivity values also share a common representation of some climate process (usually related to clouds) that might indirectly influence ECS. Suppose, for instance, that in low-ECS models the total cloud fraction in the tropics is strongly correlated with that in the southern midlatitudes but in high-ECS models the correlation is weak. Then researchers could examine whether the observed correlation is strong or weak and draw a conclusion about which type of model, and therefore which ECS value, is more likely.

Formatted: Font color: Auto

Formatted: Font color: Auto

Formatted: Font color: Auto

A problem in the emergent constraint literature is that there has been a proliferation of proposed correlations with little physical motivation. As shown by Schlund *et al.* (2020) many emergent constraints patterned on CMIP5 models (Coupled Model Intercomparison Project No. 5, used for the IPCC 5th Assessment Report) failed to work on CMIP6 models (used for the IPCC 6th Assessment Report) models (Schlund *et al.* 2020). In other words, the observed correlations in CMIP5 models between ECS and cloud processes failed to show up in CMIP6 models, indicating that they were likely spurious rather than clues to physical processes governing the Earth climate system. As a result, was that emergent constraints estimated from on CMIP5 models widened increased the range of estimated uncertainty of ECS values when applied to CMIP6 models, rather than narrowing it as intended and as claimed by NCA5.

Formatted: Superscript

Formatted: Superscript

Formatted: No underline

Formatted: No underline

Schlund *et al.* summarized the problem as follows [boldface used for emphasis]

In this study, we systematically analyze 11 published emergent constraints on ECS that have mostly been derived from models participating in the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project Phase 5 (CMIP5) project... The focus of the study is on testing if these emergent constraints hold for [Earth System Models] participating in the new Phase 6 (CMIP6). Since none of the emergent constraints considered here have been derived using the CMIP6 ensemble, CMIP6 can be used for cross-checking of the emergent constraints on a new model ensemble. **The application of the emergent constraints to CMIP6 data shows a decrease in skill and statistical significance of the emergent relationship for nearly all constraints, with this decrease being large in many cases.** Consequently, the size of the constrained ECS ranges (66% confidence intervals) widens by 51% on average in CMIP6 compared to CMIP5.

Yet NCA5 described the use of emergent constraint analysis as a great “advance” that reduced uncertainty.

3.4 RELIANCE ON AD-HOC SHORT TIME SCALES PERIODS FOR TREND ANALYSIS

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

In CWG25 Chapter 6 we discussed the need for care in the choice of time scale when making claims about trends in extreme weather. We provided examples from analysis of river flooding, heatwaves, and extreme precipitation to show how assertions about apparent trends based on short data sets fall apart when looking at longer versions of the same data sets. Here are some examples of this problem from NCA5. Here we elaborate on these examples to illustrate the general point that NCA5 made inconsistent and *ad hoc* choices about time scales of analysis, weakening the validity of their conclusions.

Formatted: Font color: Auto

McKittrick and Christy (2019) showed that apparently significant positive trends in U.S. average and extreme precipitation over the NCA4 interval (1901 – 2016) disappeared on longer samples (extending back as far as the 1840s, depending on location) or on a shorter interval coinciding with the final 40 years of the data then available (1978 – 2017). In CWG25 Section 6.4 we presented analyses of updated data for the same locations (and many others), in all cases finding both considerable regional heterogeneity and that trends detectable on one time scale are often not detected on longer or shorter time scales. These findings argue against simple attribution of changes to anthropogenic influences.

Formatted: Font color: Auto

3.4.1 Average and Extreme Precipitation

McKittrick and Christy (2019) showed that apparently significant positive trends in U.S. average and extreme precipitation over the NCA4 interval (1901 – 2016) disappeared on longer samples (extending back as far as the 1840s, depending on location) or on a shorter interval coinciding with the final 40 years of the data then available (1978 – 2017). In CWG25 Section 6.4 we presented analyses of updated data for the same locations (and many others), in all cases finding both considerable regional heterogeneity and that trends detectable on one time scale are often not detected on longer or shorter time scales. These findings argue against simple attribution of changes to anthropogenic influences.

Under Key Message 2.2 “Extreme Events Are Becoming More Frequent and Severe” (p. 2-16) NCA5 states (p. 2-18):

Rainfall is becoming more extreme

Since the 1950s, there has been an upward trend in heavy precipitation across the contiguous US. This increase is driven largely by more frequent precipitation extremes, with relatively smaller changes in their intensity.

NCA5 did not continue the NCA4 precedent of using the post-1901 interval as the time scale for its precipitation discussion; instead it refers to changes “since the 1950s”; NCA5 Figure 2.8 suggests 1958 as might be the intended start date. Under Key Message 2.2 “Extreme Events Are Becoming More Frequent and Severe” (p. 2-16) NCA5 states (p. 2-18):

Formatted: Font color: Auto

Rainfall is becoming more extreme

Since the 1950s, there has been an upward trend in heavy precipitation across the contiguous US. This increase is driven largely by more frequent precipitation extremes, with relatively smaller changes in their intensity.

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.5"

In addition to our concerns that inferences about trends are contingent on choice of time scale, we cannot reproduce the finding that positive trends are observed in extreme precipitation across all CONUS regions. For the present report we have extended the data used in CWG25 (McKittrick and Christy 2025) analysis even further to include 141 stations across the US in the Pacific Coast, Midwest, Northeast and Southeast regions (Christy 2025). We provide details in Appendix 3; here we note merely that once again, many post-1950 trends are positive but statistically insignificant depending on the measure of extreme precipitation. It is possible to find location trends that support the NCA5 position, such as the Southeast post-1950, but these results are not robust to selecting longer or shorter time scales of analysis nor do they generalize across all regions. Data from 1950 to 2024 yields many indications of increased average and extreme precipitation at individual stations and region-wide averages. But when using the entire data set (back to the 1890s or earlier, depending on location) or the later subset (1980 to 2024) the trends become smaller, in many cases they become statistically insignificant, and occasionally they even change sign. Only in the Northeast region are the post-1950 trends robust to focusing on trends during the post-1980 interval.

Formatted: Font color: Auto

The following is a more accurate summary of what U.S. data show.

There are regionally heterogeneous changes in average and extreme precipitation. Positive trends in annual average rainfall and extreme events (defined either as the annual maximum or the number of exceedances of the 99th percentile value) are generally weak or non-existent when looking at samples exceeding 130 years in length. Significant trends can be found when beginning the sample in the 1950s although in most cases the trends weaken and become insignificant when looking at the post-1980 interval. This makes attribution of changes in precipitation to anthropogenic warming difficult.

Formatted: Font color: Auto

3.24.2 Heatwaves

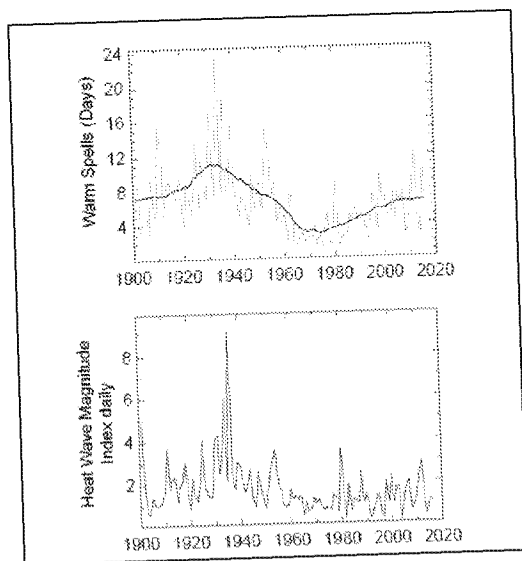
In contrast to NCA5, NCA4 examined heat extremes across the entire 20th century, pointing out that peak heat wave activity was reached in the 1930s and has decreased since then, and that recent increases are confined to areas west of the Rockies:

Formatted: Font color: Auto

[The] warmest daily temperature of the year increased in some parts of the West over the past century, but there were decreases in almost all locations east of the Rocky Mountains. In fact, all eastern regions experienced a net decrease, most notably the Midwest (about 2.2°F [1.2°C]) and the Southeast (roughly 1.5°F [0.8°C]).

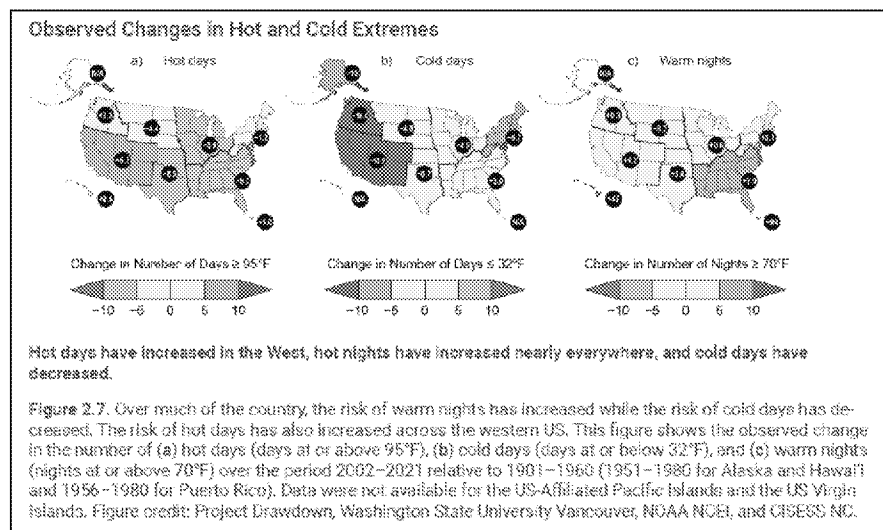
Since the mid-1960s, there has been only a very slight increase in the warmest daily temperature of the year (amidst large interannual variability). Heat waves (6-day periods with a maximum temperature above the 90th percentile for 1961–1990) increased in frequency until the mid-1930s, became considerably less common through the mid-1960s, and increased in frequency again thereafter. As with warm daily temperatures, heat wave magnitude reached a maximum in the 1930s.

(NCA4 pp. 190-191)



U.S. Heat waves since 1900. Source: NCA4 Figure 6.4

Contrast this careful and factual language with NCA5 Key Message 2.2: “Extreme Events Are Becoming More Frequent and Severe.” This blanket statement is followed by NCA5 Figure 2.7 (reproduced below) which shows the number of hot days, cold days and warm nights (respectively in panels a—c) over the period 2002-2021 compared to 1901-1960. [Presumably these are annual counts, although not stated in the caption.]



Close inspection shows that this figure contradicts the NCA5 Key Message with respect to heatwaves and instead reinforces the position of NCA4. Notwithstanding Key Message 2.2 the leftmost panel in Figure 2.7 above shows that over most of CONUS the number of extreme heat days has decreased in recent decades compared to the prior century.

The accompanying discussion in NCA5 becomes convoluted as it appears to be aimed at supporting the Key Message despite the contrary evidence. NCA5 chapter 2 elaborates on Key Message 2.2 by saying (page 16):

Observations show an increase in the severity, extent, and/or frequency of multiple types of extreme events. Heatwaves have become more common and severe in the West since the 1980s (*high confidence*).

But while it mentions the increase in hot days in the wWest it NCA5 fails to mention WHAT DECLINE the decline decrease elsewhere everywhere east of the Rockies. Instead, it says oOn the next page (page 17) it raises the comparison to the 1930s then switches to discussing global counts: THIS POINT IS UNCLEAR

By some measures, the most extreme heatwaves on record in the United States occurred during the Dust Bowl era of the 1930s. ... Globally such heatwaves are becoming more frequent, and in recent decades the western United States has been following those trends.

The reference to a global trend seems to be an attempt to tie heatwaves to anthropogenic climate change. But the obvious question, unaddressed by NCA5, is why one region follows the global pattern of increasing heatwaves it WHAT?? holds for only part of the US, while most of the country is trending in the opposite direction. These issues are addressed in Chapter 6 of CWG25, demonstrating that the range and magnitude of extreme temperatures (10s of degrees) are driven more by natural variability than by the small anthropogenic forcing. The analysis in CWG25 shows that for both (a)

hot days ($\geq 95^{\circ}\text{F}$) and (b) number of days in heatwaves, the current decade is no hotter than a century ago ~~in the U.S.~~ Thus, the NCA5 claim that “multiday heatwaves have become hotter, more frequent, larger, and longer lasting in recent decades,” is simply false when expanding the temporal and spatial domains to encompass all available data (Chapter 6 and Figure 6.3.6 of CWG25).

NCA5 then pointed to the dramatic Pacific Northwest heatwave of 2021. CWG2025 Section 8.6.1 discussed this event in detail, reviewing the multiple peer reviewed studies that explained the unusual meteorological context was unrelated to human-caused climate change, a point omitted from the NCA5 discussion.

NCA5 finally addresses the declining heatwave trend in CONUS east of the Rockies but attempts to reframe it by focusing on urban warm spells.

[The] number of very hot days has actually decreased across the central and eastern regions due to summer cooling trends in the region (Figure 2.7; Ch. 22). This does not, however, mean the central and eastern US are not affected by heat. The impacts of extreme high temperatures are more severe if such conditions persist for several days, and overall, multiday heatwaves have become hotter, more frequent, larger, and longer lasting in recent decades. Across 50 large US cities, the US Global Change Research Program heatwave indicator ([[HYPERLINK "https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves"](https://www.globalchange.gov/indicators/heat-waves)]) shows that the average number of heatwaves has doubled since the 1980s, and the length of the heatwave season has increased from about 40 days to about 70 days.

We discussed ~~this issue~~ ~~WHAT ISSUE~~ part of NCA5 in CWG25 Section 6.3. The figure referenced by NCA5 uses an *ad hoc* definition of heat wave, namely two consecutive days with minimum nighttime temperatures above the 85th percentile, and an *ad hoc* time scale which begins in the 1960s, the coldest decade in the last century, thus suppressing any comparison to the 1930s. Further, nighttime temperatures in urban areas have increased faster than daytime temperatures (which NCA5 acknowledges), but this is a signature of urban heat islands and not a good metric of climate change. CWG25 noted as well that the occurrence of hot days ($\geq 95^{\circ}\text{F}$) has recently increased in the West, but declined in the remainder of the country, and in the nationwide average, since 1899.

Formatted: Font color: Auto

Formatted: Font color: Auto

Formatted: Font color: Auto

Formatted: Font color: Auto

Formatted: Font color: Auto

45 INADEQUATE TRACEABLE ACCOUNTS

NCA3 began the practice of including a section on Traceable Accounts at the end of each chapter. This is the description from NCA5:

Each chapter concludes with a section entitled Traceable Accounts, which provides information on the overall process used to develop the chapter as well as a separate Traceable Account section for each Key Message. These Traceable Accounts describe the supporting evidence behind each Key Message, the process and rationale authors used in reaching their conclusions, and the author team's expert assessment of the confidence in and, where applicable, likelihood of these conclusions. As such, Traceable Accounts provide information about the state of the science, document sources of uncertainty, identify research gaps, and allow traceability to data and resources.

The Traceable Accounts for each Key Message includes the following sections:

- Description of Evidence Base
- Major Uncertainties and Research Gaps
- Description of Confidence and Likelihood

The Traceable Accounts could have addressed in principle address the statutory requirement that the NCA discuss scientific uncertainties. They could also help satisfy the Executive Order for Restoring Gold Standard Science by addressing reproducibility, transparency, communication of error and uncertainty, and skepticism of findings and assumptions. However, the Traceable Accounts in NCA5's Chapters 2 and 3 (the only chapters investigated here) are uneven, often superficial and noninformative/uninformative.

An example of a deficient Traceable Account is NCA5's -Key Message 2.2: "Extreme Events are Becoming More Frequent and Severe". The "Description of the Evidence Base" offers two paragraphs, the first summarizing the findings and the second generically describing the types of data that can be used for storms. "Major Uncertainties and Research Gaps" focuses on the uneven distribution across U.S. populations due to differences in exposure and vulnerability. -The only limitations in data referred to are the lack of a long-term record of lightning and the lack of homogenized daily and hourly temperature data apart from reanalysis products.

But the most astonishing deficiency is in the "Description of Confidence and Likelihood." One of the statements in Key Message 2.2 is:

Hurricanes have been intensifying more rapidly since the 1980s (high confidence) and causing heavier rainfall and higher storm surges (high confidence).

The Description of Confidence and Likelihood includes the following statement:

Basic physical understanding and climate models both provide robust explanations for the links between climate change and observed changes in these extremes: this is why the authors also have high confidence that storms are delivering more rainfall and high confidence that storm surges are becoming higher.

No reference to journal publications or a specific data set is made anywhere in the Chapter regarding hurricane-induced precipitation or storm surge to support this *high confidence* conclusion.

The Traceable Accounts for the various Key Findings of Chapter 3 have some substantial inconsistencies. Consider

Key Message 3-1: Human activities have caused global warming.

Confidence and Likelihood: "There is *very high confidence* that emissions of GHGs from human activities, fossil fuel use in particular, have *unequivocally* caused all global warming observed over the industrial era. There is also *very high confidence* that changes in natural climate drivers have had globally small and regionally variable long-term effects over this period."

The Uncertainties section addresses only uncertainties in radiative forcing by greenhouse gases. In contrast, the Traceability Analysis of Key Message 3-4 ("Humans Are Changing Earth System Processes") is arguably the most scientifically credible text in the entire Chapter raises the problem that relatively little is known about the role of natural variability at the regional scale. From its Description of Evidence Base:

In the last decade, there has been increasing recognition of the role of regional-scale natural variability in the past and future evolution of climate, as well as the fact that regional natural variability signals can be competitive with forced anthropogenic signals.

And from its Major Uncertainties and Research Gaps:

For example, the true natural variability of the climate system on decadal to centennial timescales could be larger than what we estimate from GCMs, which would further increase the irreducible uncertainty stemming from natural variability.

These statements are among the most scientifically credible in the entire NCA5 and they directly undercut the confidence assigned to Key Message 3-1.

There is also a generic problem in tracing NCA5's Traceable Accounts. The Front Matter of NCA5 states:

Each figure and some tables are accompanied by a metadata survey, which can be accessed in the online version of the report by clicking on the eyeball icon above the figure or table (see the table below for explanations of additional icons used throughout the report). The metadata survey describes data sources, figure or table development methods, copyright information, and other important documentation.

Upon clicking on the eyeball icon above a particular figure, does not reveal the metadata information, instead a "Contact Us" email appears, addressed to the USGCRP. No attempt was made to send a email to elicit the Metadata information, but This is clearly an inadequate way to archive the metadata information. It is clear that this information is not readily accessible online.

In summary, the Traceable Analyses examined here, with few exceptions, fail to meet the stated objectives set forward by the NCA.

|

56 OVEREMPHASIS ON EXTREME SCENARIOS

To respond to the GCRA mandate to “project major trends for the subsequent 25 to 100 years,” NCA5 relies on projections of future climate change based on estimates of future emissions (the so-called SSP scenarios) and/or specified levels of radiative forcing (the RCP scenarios). For the most part, NCA5 uses scenarios developed for the IPCC Assessment Reports.

In CWG Section 3.2.1 we presented a critical assessment of past and current IPCC scenario envelopes, showing that they have tended to overshoot observed emissions. The IPCC AR6 published in 2021 stated that “The likelihood of high-emission scenarios like RCP8.5 and SSP5-8.5 is considered low in light of recent energy sector developments.” and that same year UN Climate Negotiators (COP) stopped using scenarios above 4.5.

NCA5 makes the following observations about the scenarios they use:

NCA5 authors were advised to assess the full range of scenarios available. (Front Matter)

Scenarios of future emissions and land-use change are developed as plausible alternatives, but no relative likelihood is attached to them. Some recent studies, however, have argued that the highest scenario, SSP5-8.5, is no longer plausible without a reversal of current trends in the adoption of renewables and energy efficiency. (Key Message 3.3 Traceable Analysis)

Despite acknowledging the issue, NCA5 otherwise ignored the problem. A keyword search of NCA5 of mentions of RCP/SSP scenarios finds over 50% referred to the extreme emissions scenarios RCP8.5/SSP5-8.5. Further, nine of NCA5 figures (5.2, 6.9, 7.4, 11.3, 14.6, 22.13, 22.19, 27.9, 29.13) included *only* the 8.5 scenarios.

Formatted: Highlight

The problem of relying on extreme scenarios is particularly acute for NCA5’s sea level rise projections. The sea level rise scenarios used in NCA5 do not relate directly to the SSP emissions scenarios, but rather to specified amounts of sea level rise by 2100. Table 4 of NCA5’s “Guide to Using this Report” reproduced below shows that Low relates to 0.3 m (0.98 feet), Intermediate-Low relates to 0.5 m (1.64 feet), Intermediate relates to 1.0 m (3.28 feet), Intermediate-High relates to 1.5 m (4.92 feet), and High relates to 2.0 m (6.56 feet).

Table 4. Descriptive Terms for Common Sea Level Rise Scenarios Used in NCA5						
Future global mean sea level rise and sea level rise along United States coastline are shown for five scenarios in feet (and meters), relative to a 2000 baseline. The US values shown in the right half of the table are averaged across the US coastal regions, including the contiguous US, Alaska, Hawaii and the US-Affiliated Pacific Islands, and the US Caribbean. The national values shown in the table differ substantially from regional values. For example, sea level rise is higher in the Gulf Coast and lower or even negative in some parts of Alaska. In the next 30 years (2020–2050), sea level along the contiguous US coasts is expected to rise 0.92 feet (0.28 m), the same amount of sea level rise observed over the last 100 years (1920–2020). See Chapter 9 for regional sea level information. Adapted from Sweet et al. 2022. ¹						
Sea Level Rise Scenario Descriptor	Global Mean Sea Level			United States		
Year	2050	2100	2150	2050	2100	2150
Low	0.49 (0.15)	0.98 (0.3)	1.31 (0.4)	0.59 (0.18)	0.98 (0.3)	1.64 (0.5)
Intermediate-Low	0.66 (0.20)	1.64 (0.5)	2.62 (0.8)	0.75 (0.23)	1.64 (0.5)	2.95 (0.9)
Intermediate	0.92 (0.28)	3.28 (1.0)	6.23 (1.9)	0.89 (0.27)	3.28 (1.0)	6.89 (2.1)
Intermediate-High	1.21 (0.37)	4.92 (1.5)	8.86 (2.7)	1.12 (0.34)	4.92 (1.5)	8.86 (2.7)
High	1.41 (0.43)	6.56 (2.0)	12.14 (3.7)	1.38 (0.42)	6.56 (2.0)	12.46 (3.8)

Table 4 from the Front Matter of NCA5

Formatted: Font color: Auto

Considering only projections representing processes quantified with at least medium confidence, IPCC AR6 assessed global mean sea level projections for 2100 to fall between 0.2 and 1.6 m (5th–95th percentile range). Nevertheless, the range of sea level rise scenarios considered by NCA5 extends to 2.0 m. Further, NCA5 fails to include plausible lower scenarios, such as 0.2 m cited by the IPCC, which also corresponds to the average rate of sea level rise over the past century.

Chapter 9 of NCA5 offers the following predictions of sea level rise:

“Under a range of potential global warming levels, average sea level along US coastlines is *likely* to be between 12 and 20 inches above 2000 sea levels in 2050 (Figure 9.2).”

These values span from the Intermediate scenario to values slightly greater than the High scenario. They can be put into context by considering the [[HYPERLINK "https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-sea-level"](https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-sea-level)] global sea level rise from 2000–2024, approximately 3.39 inches (0.28 feet). NCA5 is thus projecting a sea level rise during 2025 and 2050 that is 3.5 to 5.8 times the rate observed during 2000–2024, an exceedingly implausible outcome. Chapter 9 further states:

“Looking toward the future, an 11 inch (28 cm) average rise along the contiguous US coastline is expected by 2050 (relative to 2020), with a *likely* range of 9–13 inches.”

...

“There is *high confidence* and it is *likely* that sea levels will rise about 11 inches (likely range of about 9–13 inches) between 2020 and 2050”

In summary, NCA5 presents future sea level rise scenarios that are not directly relatable to either SSP/RCP emissions scenarios nor to global warming levels. The NCA5 scenarios include two scenarios that are higher than the 95th percentile for the extreme emissions scenario RCP8.5 and include hypothesized ice sheet processes in which there is low confidence. Projections to 2050

require rates of sea level rise from 2025 to 2050 that are more than triple the rate observed during 2000-2024. Further, NCA5 ascribes *high confidence* to these sea level rise projections. CWG25 Section 7.3 provides further context for USGCRP projections of extraordinary sea level rise in the next 25 years.

Formatted: Font color: Auto

More generally, NCA5's inclusion, and even focus, on implausible extreme emissions scenarios supports projections of alarming impacts that are very unlikely to be driven by anthropogenic warming.

6.7 INADEQUATE NASEM REVIEW: TO BE ADDED

I THINK WE SHOULD DELETE THIS CHAPTER, IT ISN'T VERY STRONG

The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) undertook a detailed review of the draft NCA5 (NASEM 2023).⁴ While they raised some of the same concerns that we have articulated herein, their review is superficial overall and appears to be written by authors who share many of the biases of the NCA5 team. There is an inordinate focus on social and policy issues (e.g., every chapter is assessed under the heading "Comments on Equity and Justice"), rather than on the underlying science. In our assessment NASEM failed to apply the serious rigor one would expect. A few extracted comments from it will illustrate. Note that NASEM review comments are included here in blue font for reference.

6.17.1 Substantive criticisms by NASEM

- summarize the valid points made by NASEM and check the NCA replies

6.27.2 Failures to challenge NCA5 flaws

NASEM praised Chapter 2, saying:

The chapter [2] meets the requirements of Section 106 of the GCRA.

Yet contrary to the requirements of Section 106, ~~NCA5 Chapter 2~~ did not adequately discuss natural variability let alone assess the full climate record available for quantifying natural variability. Chapter 2 actually minimizes natural variability by claiming (unsubstantiated) skill in attributing recent extremes to human causes. For example NCA5's Chapter 2 Introduction states,

Formatted: Not Strikethrough

"...recent advances in attribution science (KM [[HYPERLINK "https://nca2023.globalchange.gov/chapter/3"](https://nca2023.globalchange.gov/chapter/3) \l "key-message-3" \t "_blank"]) mean that the role of climate change in some extreme events can now be quantified in real time. For example, climate change made the record-breaking Pacific Northwest heatwave of June 2021 2° to 4°F hotter, and in 2017 ..."

⁴ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2023. *Review of the Draft Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. [[HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.17226/26757"](https://doi.org/10.17226/26757)].

CWG25 reviews the expert literature demonstrating that this particular event would have happened with or without climate change and that for CONUS, hot extremes are no more frequent now than they were in the past. NASEM did not challenge the unsubstantiated attribution claims in NCA5.

Notwithstanding NASEM's claim that the Chapter complies with Section 106 of the GCRA, it then acknowledged the absence of discussion of natural variability:

...the discussion and references regarding the role of natural climate variability and its regional differences are missing.

While a nod to natural variability is occasionally found in NCA5, it is usually followed by a "however" to emphasize human influence. One example is the statement just before the claim mentioned above pertaining to extreme event attribution: "There has always been extreme weather, which occurs even in an unchanged climate due to the natural variability of the Earth system. However, recent advances in attribution science (KM [[HYPERLINK "https://nca2023.globalchange.gov/chapter/3"](https://nca2023.globalchange.gov/chapter/3)] \l "key-message-3" \t "_blank")) mean that the role of climate change in some extreme events can now be quantified in real time..."

We pointed ~~o~~ ~~REFERENCE THE SPECIFIC SECTION OF THIS REPORT~~ out (Section 4.2) that the evidence regarding heatwaves directly contradicts Key Message 2.2. NASEM did not mention this, instead it focused on a somewhat esoteric issue of terminology:

"Extreme Events Are Becoming More Frequent and Severe."

Key Message 2.2 is another generally well written key message. However, while the title of this key message includes the word "risk," the key message is exclusively about hazard. The Committee suggests rewriting the key message title to more accurately reflect the discussion on hazards.

The NASEM review appears to accept NCA5's use of short data records because it makes no critical remarks about the failure to assess long time series, except for its observation that the use of short records makes the omission of natural variability that much more of a problem:

It is also important to point out that the influence of natural climate variability becomes particularly strong when the climate trend is computed based on short periods of time or small geographic areas.

This comment was largely ignored in the NCA5 final text.

In sum, while the NASEM review might bestow the Academies' imprimatur on the NCA5 report, it does not necessarily add to its quality for two reasons. As we have demonstrated, the NASEM review falls short in rigor and completeness. And second, the NCA authors are not obligated to follow the NASEM recommendations in crafting their final product.

78 SUMMARY EVALUATION OF NCA5

CHAPTER NEEDS A COMPLETE REWRITE

whether NCA5: (1) complied with the USGCRP's statutory obligation, (2) adheres to the core tenets of Gold Standard Science, and (3) can suitably inform federal climate and energy policy.

The most straightforward evaluation of NCA5 is through its statutory requirements. While it is not within our purview to make definitive rulings on compliance, we believe there are several important aspects to consider when evaluating NCA5 against its statutory requirements. Add text per Seth's letter ...

~~Our expertise in climate science, the foundational area covered by NCA5, allows a different perspective, one that finds the coverage unbalanced and selective. Our review has identified numerous instances where NCA5 falls short of the quality and integrity expected of scientific document of this importance. Furthermore, our examination suggests that the entire process—from the selection of contributing authors to the handling of expert reviews—appears to have been systematically biased toward reinforcing predetermined conclusions and amplifying alarmist messaging rather than presenting a balanced scientific assessment. In short, NCA5 was written to persuade, not inform.~~

~~A third perspective for evaluating NCA5 is that of citizens interested in good policymaking. The changing climate is a legitimate public concern, as are concerns about cost of living, economic growth, employment opportunities, and other socioeconomic factors. We share the widespread belief that elected officials should have access to the highest quality information when crafting energy and climate policy decisions that must balance multiple concerns. From this perspective, NCA5 is a missed opportunity. What could have been a valuable contribution to informed tradeoffs instead became a misleading advocacy document that corrupts the policymaking process.~~

The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) undertook a detailed review of the draft NCA5 (NASEM 2023). While they raised some of the same concerns that we have articulated herein, their review is superficial overall and appears to be written by authors who share many of the biases of the NCA5 team. There is an inordinate focus on social and policy issues (e.g., every chapter is assessed under the heading "Comments on Equity and Justice"), rather than on the underlying science. In our assessment NASEM failed to apply the serious rigor one would expect. A few extracted comments from it will illustrate. Note that NASEM review comments are included here in blue font for reference.

89 REFERENCES

- Aven, Terje (2017) "Improving Risk Characterisations in Practical Situations by Highlighting Knowledge Aspects, with Applications to Risk Matrices," *Reliability Engineering & System Safety* 167 (November 2017): 42–48 [[HYPERLINK](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0951832016306950) "https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0951832016306950"]
- Climate Working Group (2025) Impacts of Carbon Dioxide Emissions on the U.S. Climate. Washington DC: Department of Energy, May 27, 2025.
- Dellawalla, Colette, Victor Ambrose, Carl Bergstrom *et al.* (2025) "Trump's new 'gold standard' rule will destroy American science as we know it." *The Guardian* May 29, 2025 [[HYPERLINK](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/29/trump-american-science) "https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/29/trump-american-science"]
- Diffenbaugh, N.S., D. Singh, and J.S. Mankin, 2018: Unprecedented climate events: Historical changes, aspirational targets, and national commitments. *Science Advances*, 4 (2), 3354. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aao3354>
- Handler, Philip (1980) Public Doubts About Science. *Science* 208(4448) p. 1093 [[HYPERLINK](https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.208.4448.1093) "https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.208.4448.1093"]
- Kirchmeier-Young, M.C. and X. Zhang, 2020: Human influence has intensified extreme precipitation in North America. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 117 (24), 13308-13313. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1921628117>
- Knutson, Thomas and Fanrong Zeng (2018) "Model Assessment of Observed Precipitation Trends over Land Regions: Detectable Human Influences and Possible Low Bias in Model Trends" *Journal of Climate* 31(12) [[HYPERLINK](https://journals.ametsoc.org/view/journals/clim/31/12/jcli-d-17-0672.1.xml) "https://journals.ametsoc.org/view/journals/clim/31/12/jcli-d-17-0672.1.xml"]
- Koonin, Steven (2024) *Unsettled: What Climate Science Tells Us, What It Doesn't, and Why It Matters*. ---: ---
- McKittrick, R., and J.R. Christy (2019). Assessing changes in US regional precipitation on multiple time scales. *Journal of Hydrology*, 578, 124074. [[HYPERLINK](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhydrol.2019.124074) "https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhydrol.2019.124074"]
- [McKittrick, R., and J.R. Christy \(2025\). "Data and Code for DoE Report 2025". Mendeley Data, V1, doi: 10.17632/8n9ks93vn7.1](https://doi.org/10.17632/8n9ks93vn7.1)
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2023. *Review of the Draft Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. [[HYPERLINK](https://doi.org/10.17226/26757) "https://doi.org/10.17226/26757"]
- NCA4. (2017). *Climate science special report: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume I* (D. J. Wuebbles, D. W. Fahey, and K. A. Hibbard, Eds.). U.S. Global Change Research Program. [[HYPERLINK](https://doi.org/10.7930/J0J964J6) "https://doi.org/10.7930/J0J964J6"]
- NCA5. (2023). *Fifth National Climate Assessment* (A. R. Crimmins et al., Eds.). U.S. Global Change Research Program. [[HYPERLINK](https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH1) "https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH1"]
- Pielke Jr., R. (2024). Scientific integrity and U.S. 'billion dollar disasters'. *npj Natural Hazards*, 1, Article 12. [[HYPERLINK](https://www.nature.com/articles/s44304-024-00011-0) "https://www.nature.com/articles/s44304-024-00011-0"]
- Pielke Jr., R. (2025, May 8). RIP NOAA's billion dollar disasters. *The Honest Broker* [Substack]. [[HYPERLINK](https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/rip-noaas-billion-dollar-disasters) "https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/rip-noaas-billion-dollar-disasters"]
- Schlund, Manuel, Axel Lauer, Pierre Gentine, Steven C. Sherwood, and Veronika Eyring (2020) Emergent constraints on equilibrium climate sensitivity in CMIP5: do they hold for CMIP6? *Earth System Dynamics* 11 1233-1258 [[HYPERLINK](https://doi.org/10.5194/esd-11-1233-2020) "https://doi.org/10.5194/esd-11-1233-2020"]

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Charge to the review

| **APPENDIX 2: statutory requirements for NCA5**

APPENDIX 32: Analysis of U.S. Reproducibility of NCA5 claim of Long-term Precipitation Record extreme precipitation trends

DELETE APPENDIX 3. WE SHOULD NOT BE PRESENTING ORIGINAL ANALYSES IN THIS REPORT
[I'm not sure we need both the tables and multipanel figures here. Is anyone really going to
look at the tables? Perhaps they can be eliminated and just keep the figures?]

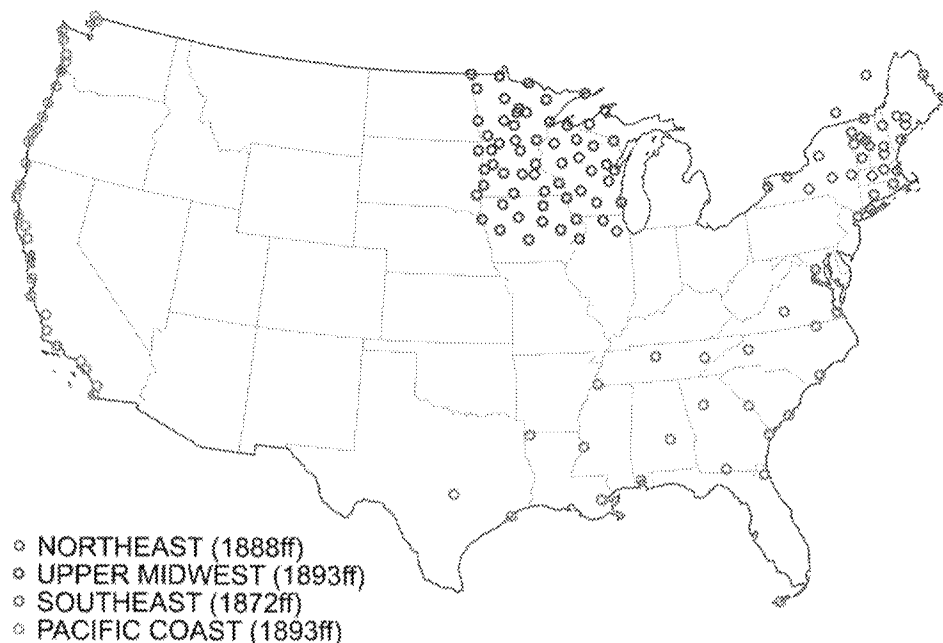


Figure A1: Stations used in the following analyses.

Note: All data are available at Christy (2025). Methods as described in McKittrick and Christy (2019).
code available at McKittrick and Christy (2025).

Figure: Stations used in the following analyses.

Table codes: (-) neg insignificant, -- neg significant, (+) pos insignificant, ++ pos significant.

Column 1: Measure

Column 2: Number of stations in that region

Column 3: Count of stations exhibiting a significant positive trend

Column 3: Count of stations exhibiting a significant negative trend

Column 5: Characteristic of region-wide trend

|

PACIFIC COAST

Since 1893:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	29	0	1	(-)
2-day average	29	0	1	(-)
Avg on non-zero days	29	0	9	--
Variability	29	1	0	(+)
Annual max	29	2	1	(+)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	29	1	0	(-)

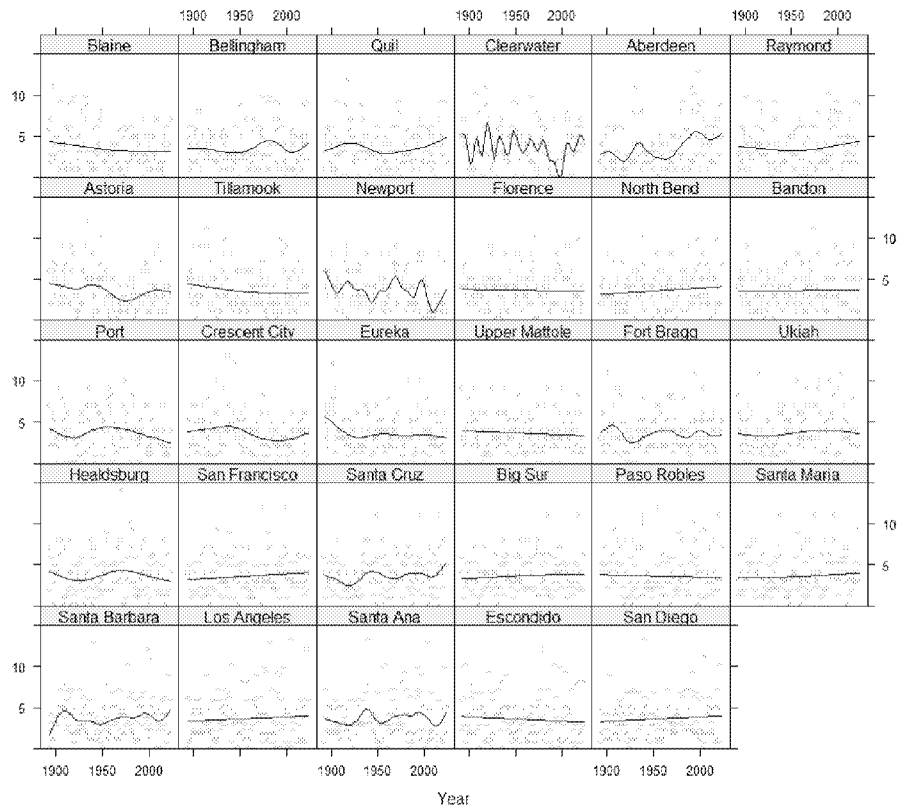
Since 1950:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	29	0	1	(-)
2-day average	29	0	1	(-)
Avg on non-zero days	29	0	4	(-)
Variability	29	2	3	(-)
Annual max	29	6	3	(-)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	29	2	1	(-)

Since 1980:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	29	0	0	(-)
2-day average	29	0	0	(-)
Avg on non-zero days	29	0	1	(-)
Variability	29	0	0	(-)
Annual max	29	2	1	(-)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	29	0	0	(+)

Annual No. 99th Percentile Exceedances PC 1893-2024



SOUTHEAST

Since 1873:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	24	1	1	(+)
2-day average	24	1	1	(+)
Avg on non-zero days	24	7	2	(+)
Variability	24	1	0	(+)
Annual max	24	2	0	(+)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	24	5	0	(+)

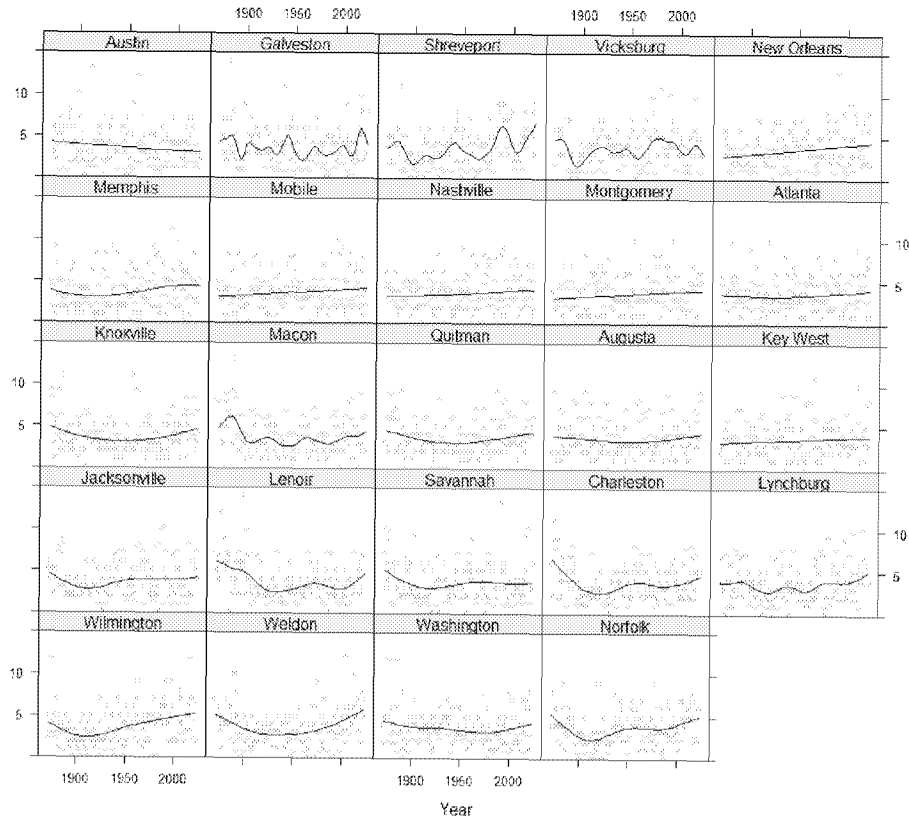
Since 1950:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	24	5	0	++
2-day average	24	5	0	++
Avg on non-zero days	24	5	1	++
Variability	24	6	0	++
Annual max	24	4	0	++
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	24	4	0	(+)

Since 1980:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	24	5	0	(+)
2-day average	24	5	0	(+)
Avg on non-zero days	24	5	1	(+)
Variability	24	3	0	(+)
Annual max	24	4	0	(+)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	24	4	0	(+)

Annual No. 99th Percentile Exceedances SE 1873-2024



MIDWEST

Since 1893:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	61	23	0	++
2-day average	61	23	0	++
Avg on non-zero days	61	2	12	(+)
Variability	61	12	0	++
Annual max	61	9	0	(+)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	61	10	0	(+)

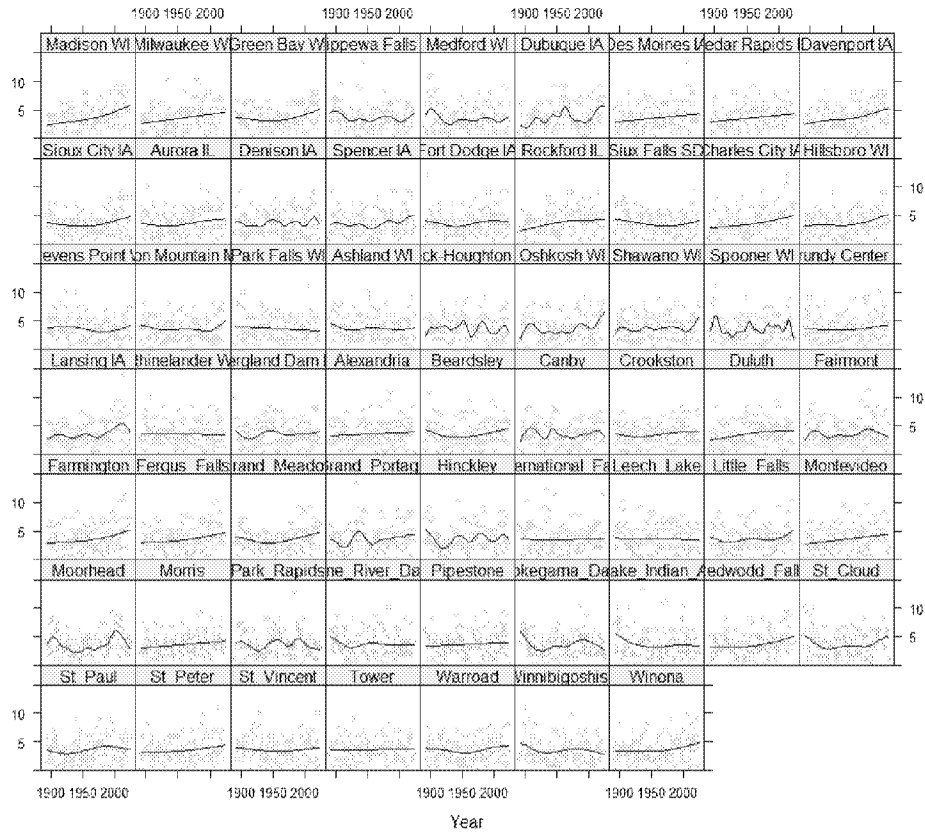
Since 1950:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	61	28	2	++
2-day average	61	28	2	++
Avg on non-zero days	61	11	1	++
Variability	61	16	0	(+)
Annual max	61	8	0	(+)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	61	19	0	++

Since 1980:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	61	6	1	(+)
2-day average	61	6	1	(+)
Avg on non-zero days	61	8	2	(+)
Variability	61	5	1	(+)
Annual max	61	0	1	(+)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	61	5	3	(-)

Annual No. 99th Percentile Exceedances MW 1893-2024



NORTHEAST

Since 1888:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	27	12	0	++
2-day average	27	12	0	++
Avg on non-zero days	27	7	1	(+)
Variability	27	4	0	(+)
Annual max	27	3	0	(-)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	27	5	0	(+)

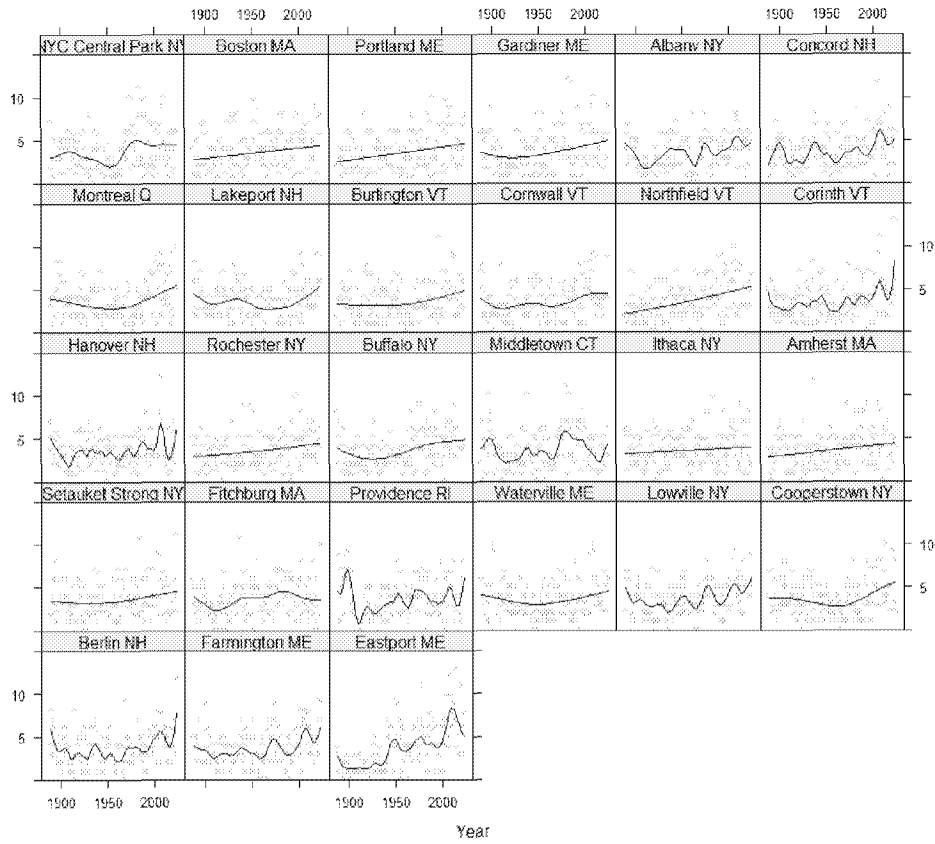
Since 1950:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	27	12	0	++
2-day average	27	12	0	++
Avg on non-zero days	27	7	1	(+)
Variability	27	4	0	(+)
Annual max	27	3	0	(-)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	27	5	0	++

Since 1980:

	No. stns	+ trends	- trends	region
1-day average	27	10	1	++
2-day average	27	10	1	++
Avg on non-zero days	27	6	0	(+)
Variability	27	2	0	(+)
Annual max	27	1	0	(+)
Number of 99 th pct exceedances	27	1	1	++

Annual No. 99th Percentile Exceedances NE 1888-2024



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Insert updated bios]

OUO – Official Use Only



Impacts of Carbon Dioxide Emissions on the U.S. Climate

Climate Working Group
United States Department of Energy
May 27, 2025

OUO – Official Use Only

OUO – Official Use Only

Impacts of Carbon Dioxide Emissions on the U.S. Climate

Report to U.S. Energy Secretary Christopher Wright

May 27, 2025

Climate Working Group:

John Christy, Ph.D.

Judith Curry, Ph.D.

Steven Koonin, Ph.D.

Ross McKittrick, Ph.D.

Roy Spencer, Ph.D.

Copyright © 2025 United States

Suggested citation:

Climate Working Group (2025) Impacts of Carbon Dioxide Emissions on the U.S. Climate. Washington DC: Department of Energy, May 27, 2025.

OUO – Official Use Only

Table of Contents

[TOC\O "1-3" \H \Z \U]

SECRETARY'S FOREWORD

Energy, Integrity, and the Power of Human Potential

Over my lifetime, I've had the privilege of working as an energy entrepreneur across a range of fields—nuclear, geothermal, natural gas, and more—and I now serve as Secretary of Energy under President Donald Trump. But above all, I'm a physical scientist who sees modern energy as nothing short of miraculous. It powers every aspect of modern life, drives every industry, and has made America an energy powerhouse with the ability to fuel global progress.

The rise of human flourishing over the past two centuries is a story worth celebrating. Yet we are told—relentlessly—that the very energy systems that enabled this progress now pose an existential threat. Hydrocarbon-based fuels, the argument goes, must be rapidly abandoned or else we risk planetary ruin.

That view demands scrutiny. That's why I commissioned this report: to encourage a more thoughtful and science-based conversation about climate change and energy. With my technical background, I've reviewed reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the U.S. government's assessments, and the academic literature. I've also engaged with many climate scientists, including the authors of this report.

What I've found is that media coverage often distorts the science. Many people—even well-meaning ones—walk away with a view of climate change that is exaggerated or incomplete. To provide clarity, I asked a diverse team of independent experts to summarize the current state of climate science, with a focus on how it relates to the United States.

I didn't select these authors because we always agree—far from it. In fact, they may not always agree with each other. But I chose them for their rigor, honesty, and willingness to elevate the debate. I exerted no control over their conclusions. What you'll read are their words, drawn from the best available data and scientific assessments.

I've reviewed the report carefully and challenged its findings. I believe it faithfully represents the state of climate science today. Still, many readers may be surprised by its conclusions—which differ in important ways from the mainstream narrative. That's a sign of how far the public conversation has drifted from the science itself.

To correct course, we need open, respectful, and informed debate. That's why I'm inviting public comment on this report. Honest scrutiny and scientific transparency should be at the heart of our policymaking.

Climate change is real, and it deserves attention. But it is not the greatest threat facing humanity. That distinction belongs to global energy poverty. As someone who values data, I know that improving the human condition depends on expanding access to reliable, affordable energy. Climate change is a challenge—not a catastrophe. But misguided policies based on fear rather than facts could truly endanger human well-being.

We stand at the threshold of a new era of energy leadership. If we empower innovation rather than restrain it, America can lead the world in providing cleaner, more abundant energy—lifting billions out of poverty, strengthening our economy, and improving our environment along the way.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reviews scientific certainties and uncertainties in how anthropogenic carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions have affected, or will affect, the Nation's climate, extreme weather events, and selected metrics of societal well-being. Those emissions are increasing the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere through a complex and variable carbon cycle, where some portion of the additional CO₂ persists in the atmosphere for centuries.

Elevated concentrations of CO₂ enhance plant growth, globally “greening” the planet and increasing agricultural productivity. They also make the oceans less alkaline (lower the pH) by an amount within the range of natural variability. That is possibly detrimental to coral reefs, although the recent rebound of the Great Barrier Reef suggests otherwise.

Carbon dioxide also acts as a greenhouse gas, exerting a warming influence on climate and weather. Scenarios of future CO₂ emissions have tended to overestimate observed levels.

The world's several dozen detailed climate models offer little guidance on how the climate responds to elevated CO₂, with the average surface warming under a doubling of the CO₂ concentration ranging from 1.8°C to 5.7°C, a larger range than simpler, data driven estimates, which suggest a response in the range 1.8°C to 2.7°C.

Detailed climate models generally run “hot” in their description of the climate of the past few decades - too much warming at the surface and ~~too much amplification of warming in the lower- and mid-troposphere in the lower- and mid-troposphere too much amplification of warming aloft.~~ They also produce too much stratospheric cooling, too much snow loss, and too much warming in the Corn Belt. The combination of overly sensitive models and extreme scenarios for future emissions has exaggerated projections of future warming.

Most extreme weather events do not show long-term trends. Claims of increased frequency or intensity of hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and droughts are not supported by historical data. Additionally, forest management practices are often overlooked in assessing wildfire activity. Global sea level has risen approximately 8 inches since 1900, but there are significant regional variations in tide gauge data driven primarily by local land subsidence; U.S. tide gauge measurements in aggregate show no obvious acceleration in sea level rise beyond the historical average rate.

The attribution of particular climate changes or extreme weather events to human CO₂ emissions is challenged by natural climate variability, data limitations, and inherent model deficiencies. Moreover, solar activity's contribution to the warming climate might be underestimated.

Both models and experience suggest that CO₂-induced warming might be less damaging economically than commonly believed, and excessively aggressive mitigation policies could prove more detrimental than beneficial. Social Cost of Carbon estimates, which attempt to quantify the economic damage of CO₂ emissions, are highly sensitive to their underlying assumptions and so provide limited independent information.

The report supports a more nuanced and evidence-based approach to climate policy. The risks and benefits of a climate changing under both natural and human influences must be weighed against the costs, efficacy, and collateral impacts of any “climate action”, considering the nation's need for reliable and affordable energy with minimal local pollution. Beyond continuing precise, un-interrupted observations of the global climate system, it will be important to make realistic assumptions about future emissions, re-evaluate climate models to address biases and uncertainties, and clearly acknowledge the limitations of ~~extreme~~ event attribution studies. An approach that acknowledges both the potential risks and benefits of